

FALL HUNTING ISSUE

# FIELD & STREAM

GUN TEST

BARGAIN  
MUZZLELOADERS  
RANKED AND RATED  
P. 85



THE SOUL OF THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN ★ NOVEMBER 2015



11TH ANNUAL

## BEST DAYS OF THE RUT

9 MUST-HUNT DATES

EXPERT TACTICS  
FOR EVERY PHASE

RUT REPORTS  
FOR YOUR REGION

**BONUS**

SPECIAL FOLDOUT SECTION:  
GIANT READER BUCKS P. 57



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- × EASY COYOTES
- × DUCK PARADISE
- × HOT TROUT FLIES
- × PETZAL VS. RATS
- × QUAIL POINTERS
- × LONG-RANGE SHOOTING MYTHS
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NOVEMBER 2015



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and his Best Day  
rut trophy.



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FROM  
THE  
EDITOR

F&S

# Rut Reporters

REAL-TIME UPDATES ON THE BEST DAYS TO HUNT, INCLUDING PREDICTIONS, TRAIL-CAM PICTURES, VIDEOS, TACTICS, AND SUCCESS STORIES



HAT'D YOU SEE?

That's the question of the hour during late October and November, when my hunting buddies and I are constantly checking in through calls and texts. We all want to know what's happening in the deer woods and have the suspicion that whenever we're not there, the action is hot. Whitetails aren't the only ones driven wild during the rut.

We have good reason for the frequent updates, because conditions change quickly and dramatically at this time of year. Even though it can be the best time to bag a big buck, it can also be the most unpredictable and frustrating.

To help you get a handle on that uncertainty, F&S has dispatched a team of expert deer hunters across the nation to give real-time updates on rut activity. Headed by hunting editor Will Brantley, our Rut Reporters team ([fieldandstream.com/rutreporters](http://fieldandstream.com/rutreporters)) shares trail-camera photos and videos, stories of big bucks taken, information on current rut timing and conditions and, most importantly, tips on how you can use this knowledge in the field. No matter where you hunt, they have you covered. Think of them as the hunting buddies you text during the season—except it's their job to help you tag the trophy. Be sure to check out [fieldandstream.com](http://fieldandstream.com) all season long.

In this issue, Rut Reporter Scott Bestul analyzes each phase of the rut, details the most successful tactics, and makes some predictions about the best days to be in the woods for each region of the country. And in "The Rut Club" (p. 57), we bring you the stories and photographs of some incredible bucks that were taken by readers last year on F&S's 2014 Best Days of the Rut, such as Shawn McDonough's 190-class Wisconsin giant.

Last season I had planned to take off of work on our pick for the Best Day, but a business trip had me on a plane instead of in a treestand. The day turned out to be cool, clear, and crisp. I knew it was going to be as good as we predicted even before the calls and photos starting coming in from my friends. This year I'm not going to let anything keep me out of the woods on those days, and I hope you hunt them too. If you do, make sure you let us know how you did, and maybe next year your buck will appear in these pages.

*Anthony Licata*

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**Surprise** F&S Rut Reporter Scott Bestul caught this buck on a trail cam during last year's rut. He had never seen him before and never has again.

## CONTRIBUTORS



With the photographs for "The Rut Club" (p. 57), husband-and-wife team **Jenn Ackerman** and **Tim Gruber** hoped to showcase both the trophies and the hunters who tagged them. "We wanted to capture a slice of these guys' lives," says Gruber, whose work with rut. He had never seen him before and never has again. Ackerman has appeared in *Esquire* and *Wired*. "We didn't want straightforward portraits."



**Tom Davis** has spent the past 30-plus years writing about dogs and bird hunting, but in telling the story of two of his setters ("Butch's Legacy," p. 78), he forced himself to be especially candid. "It was less an assignment than a challenge from F&S," says Davis. "I wanted to pay tribute to both dogs and reveal what connects them without lapsing into sentimentality."

MILLER MOBLEY (LICATA); SCOTT BESTUL (BUCK); NATHAN KIRKMAN (DAVIS)





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PHOTOGRAPHER: BRIAN GROSSENBACHER  
LOCATION: KITIMAT RIVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA







**FIRST SHOT**

## ZONING IN

✦ Darren Wright, co-owner of the Steelhead House lodge in British Columbia, was casting for steelhead on the Kitimat River when photographer Brian Grossenbacher took this shot from a logging bridge. “I’ve been Spey casting for 17 years,” says Wright. “I love the grace of it and being able to reach the other side of the river. Here, I’m setting up my D loop for a snap-T cast.” Wright, who grew up playing hockey in northern Ontario, adds, “A good caster is always focused on technique but at the same time is in the zone. I think athletic people can pick up Spey casting better than most because of their hand-eye coordination, and they also tend to use their body to cast rather than just their arms.”

“The fishing was slow. The water was low and clear, and the sun was out all day. But no matter what, it’s great to be on the water. What I like most about the Kitimat is that we fish within 5 miles of the salt, and the steelhead and salmon are fresh from the ocean—explosive, bright fish that take the fly hard.” —DONNA L. NG



# CHEERS & JEERS

WHITETAIL TURF WARS, WILD PIG POLITICS, AND ONE HEFTY GEAR TAB



**PIG IDEA**  
Hiring Will Brantley as hunting editor was a stroke of genius. His writing is excellent, and his story "The Pig Report" (Sept. 2015) is one of the best pieces on environmental, hunting, or wildlife issues I've ever read.  
W. Alan Wentz,  
Germantown, Tenn.

## LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE GUIDES

"Straight Talk From the Deer Guides" was one of the most informative and well-rounded hunting articles I've read in a long time. I would love a follow-up about exit strategies for stands along field edges.

Tram Rogerson, Greenville, S.C.

The "Best & Worst" segment had me laughing so hard it hurt.

Larry Donna, Hudson, Wis.

Your guide survey labels New York and New Jersey as the states with the worst hunters, but one step over the line into Pennsylvania, and they're the best. That's

bogus. New York has exceptional hunter-safety records: In 2014, there were fewer than four incidents per 100,000 hunters (and only one fatality). I know we're not supposed to believe everything we read, but should we now include F&S on that list?

Ed Smith, Sherrill, N.Y.

What state has the most easily offended hunters? Never mind... To even the score, we asked N.Y. and N.J. hunters to defend their states in our Loaded Question (right).

—THE EDITORS

## SWINE IN THE SAND

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a great idea ("The Pig Report") and could be cost-effective if local governments hire the right outfits. My beef, though, is that outlawing recreational pig hunting won't help the problem. When it comes down to it, dead pigs are dead pigs.

Jordan Meekins, Albany, Ore.

#### WATER SHORTAGE

I've noticed that lately this magazine should be titled *Big Field & Little Stream*, as 90 percent of the content seems dedicated to hunting, with little about fishing. Has this decline been happening for a while?

Greg Shighara, Idaho Falls, Idaho

*During spring and summer, we have more fishing coverage. During fall and winter, we have more on hunting. That said, we hope you enjoy the stories on pages 22, 35, 36, 44, and 68 in this issue.*

—THE EDITORS

#### CHEAP SHOT

"Best of the Best" notes that "innovation doesn't have to cost a king's ransom," but the average price per item is \$2,301.45, which isn't exactly cheap. If, say, we buy only one ATV and pass on the truck, we're down to an

\$816.15 average cost. That's still expensive. Perhaps the next article should be "42 Top Alternatives for Hunters on a Budget."

Nathan Fennelly, via Facebook

*We assume you're not going to run out and buy every item on this list, which, by the way, is called "Best of the Best," not "Best of the Cheap Stuff."*

—THE EDITORS

*CORRECTION: In "Best of the Best," we ran a picture of a Dead Air Armament 7.62 Sandman-S instead of the Dead Air Armament 7.62 Sandman-L. We regret the error.*

—THE EDITORS

#### LOADED QUESTION

### Q Why are New York and New Jersey great deer hunting states?

People think of New York only as the city, but upstate has more woods than you could walk through in a lifetime.

—Stephen Culbreth

Please stay away, the hunting stinks. Trust me.

—Marc D. Paladino

You have to actually brave the freezing-cold woods and find a good spot. There's no sitting over food plots and shooting semi-tame deer you've picked from trail-cam pictures. Even a doe is a trophy.

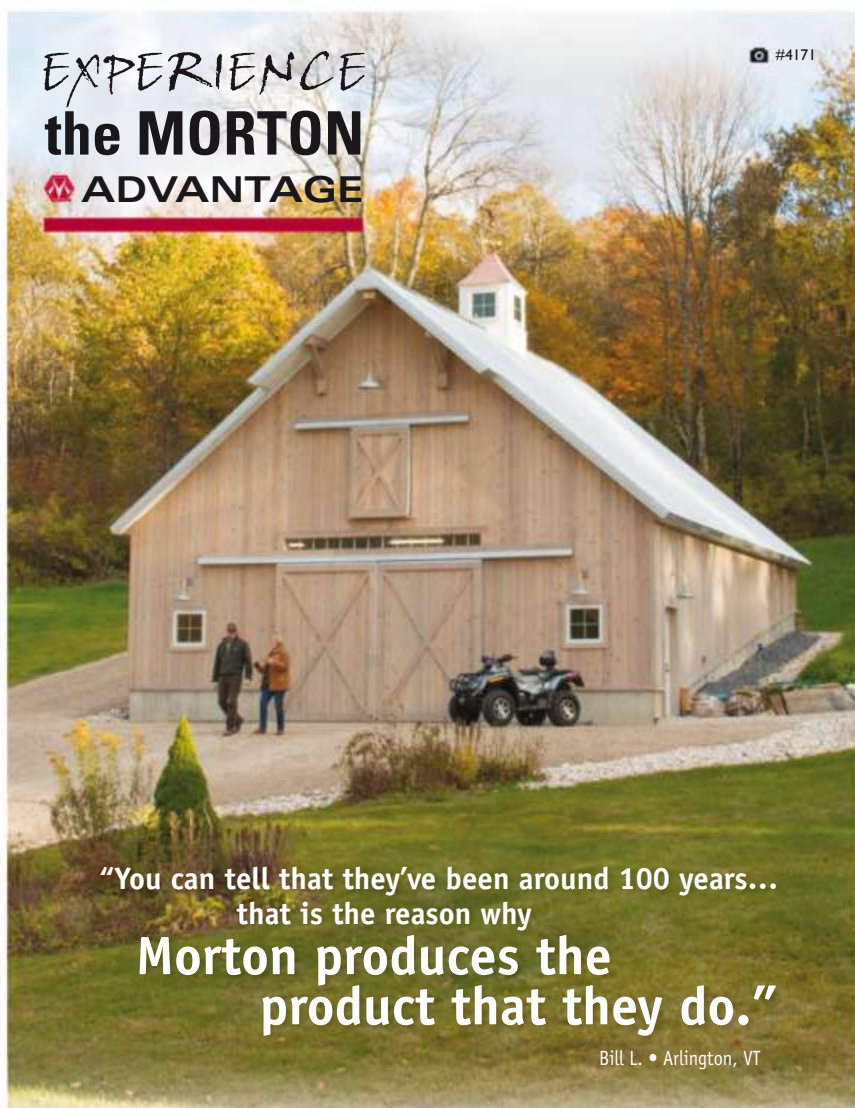
—Oak Richards

Sound off on next month's Loaded Question at [Facebook.com/FieldandStream](https://www.facebook.com/FieldandStream). We'll share the best responses here.

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- THE SEASON
- ASK PETZAL
- RIFLES
- ESCAPES
- HUNTING
- THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN
- CONSERVATION
- THE WILD CHEF

## TUNDRA SWAN SONG

For waterfowlers lucky enough to draw a tag, targeting these trophy birds is a bucket-list thrill. Just prepare for a long, cold hunt

By David Draper

# CAMPFIRE







**Shell Out**

The author (right) and his guide pull the decoy spread off Great Salt Lake.



**C**HAD YAMANE has a plan. The Salt Lake City firefighter and guide for Fried Feathers stashes a pick-head ax in the bottom of his aluminum boat, and together we push the floating blind into the slush of Utah's Great Salt Lake. Somewhere out there, Yamane hopes, is open water, where we may still have a chance to call a tundra swan into range.

Last night, the saltwater basin locked up under a sheet of ice. A brutal November storm had rolled in, stranding motorists across the Northern Rockies and scattering the 12,000-plus tundra swans resting on the nearby Bear River Migratory Refuge. Most of the birds have now flown south, winging with them my odds of filling the swan tag I waited three years to draw.

If Yamane has any doubts that we'll make it out onto the lake, he doesn't let on. Whenever the boat grinds to a halt in the freezing slop, he simply puts the motor in reverse, backs up a few feet, then guns the engine. As ice scrapes against the aluminum hull, I can't help but worry we'll soon get stuck for good.

## ICE BREAKER

When we eventually reach a small open hole just off a point of bulrushes—no ice-breaking ax required—Yamane and I begin to set the spread. Other than the ax, hunting swans doesn't require much specialized gear. On the Great Salt Lake, a boat isn't a necessity: a majority of the 2,000 waterfowlers lucky enough to draw a tag pass-shoot swans from the hundreds of miles of dikes that control the water levels of the surrounding marshes. Yamane and I are hoping to decoy our bird, so we line the slushy hole with a dozen oversize plastic swans. Replicating the swan's distinctive sound is more important than the dekes, but even that doesn't require a species-specific tool. Yamane, like most swan hunters, calls the birds with his mouth, whooping and hooting. I give it a try but immediately feel foolish. I decide to save my hooting and hollering for when—if—I pull the trigger.

I remember the first time I saw a swan mount, in my local taxidermist's



**Snow Bird** • The author admires his hard-earned tundra swan.

shop. The bird was reared back, with its wings spread, and its long neck extended, stately and royal. Though impressive, the mount was a little surreal. *Aren't tundra swans protected?* As it turns out, huntable populations range across the U.S., but only six states offer tags for them. Once I discovered tundra swans were fair game, I became obsessed with hunting them.

In Utah, before you can even apply for a swan license, the state requires that you complete an online course on how to differentiate between the tundra swan and the federally protected trumpeter swan. When I first applied, in 2012, friends assured me that it would take only a year to draw a tag. In the past few years, swan hunting has become so popular in Utah, though, that getting drawn now calls for up to three preference points.

## NO BIG WHOOP

As Yamane and I wait out the afternoon, we spot few swans other than seven or eight flocks flickering over the middle of the lake. Eventually, two or three groups pass nearby, and we hear a shotgun re-

port as a flock flies near another hunter braving the subzero temperatures. We can't see him, but we hear his celebratory shout when a bird thuds onto the ice. I can't help but feel a little jealous.

An hour later, we hear swan whoops just above the rushes behind us. Yamane motions me down into the blind, then answers the birds' calls. They continue the conversation until Yamane coaxes them over the blind, nearly within range. My insides coil like a spring. But the cue to shoot never comes, and the swans fly on.

Before I can even ask, Yamane explains: "Too many juvies. Didn't want to chance it." Young tundra swans still wear the gray plumage of a poult, and though legal to shoot, they aren't as prized as the white-feathered adults. I keep to myself that I'd deem any swan a trophy at this point, but I'm sure my curt "O.K." gets the point across.

## BRACE FOR IMPACT

As the afternoon turns colder and darker, I replay the flyover in my head, fearing that we've missed our only chance at a swan. Yamane acts confident, but I can tell that he's as surprised as I am when a call floats in overhead. Visibility has dropped to a quarter mile, maybe less. Swans are out there, but I can't tell where. Yamane gives a whoop, and a bird responds. Now the flock is even closer. White spots appear in the gray fog. Seven adults pass overhead and circle just outside the spread, but then, like the previous group, pump their wings and retreat.

One more opportunity gone—and with so little time left in the day, I doubt there'll be another.

Then a single bird breaks from the flock and circles back. My fingers tighten around the shotgun. The swan, bright and mature, locks its wings and glides over the open water. Though it seems impossible to whiff on such a big target, missing is all I can think of. The swan lowers its black landing gear, and as I stand, I can no longer feel the aching cold in my feet. I cover the bird's head with my shotgun barrel and squeeze the trigger. The bird crumples and somersaults into the slush with a cannonball's splash.

Finally, it's my turn to whoop. **ES**



Once I discovered tundra swans were fair game, I became obsessed.

## GEAR TIP

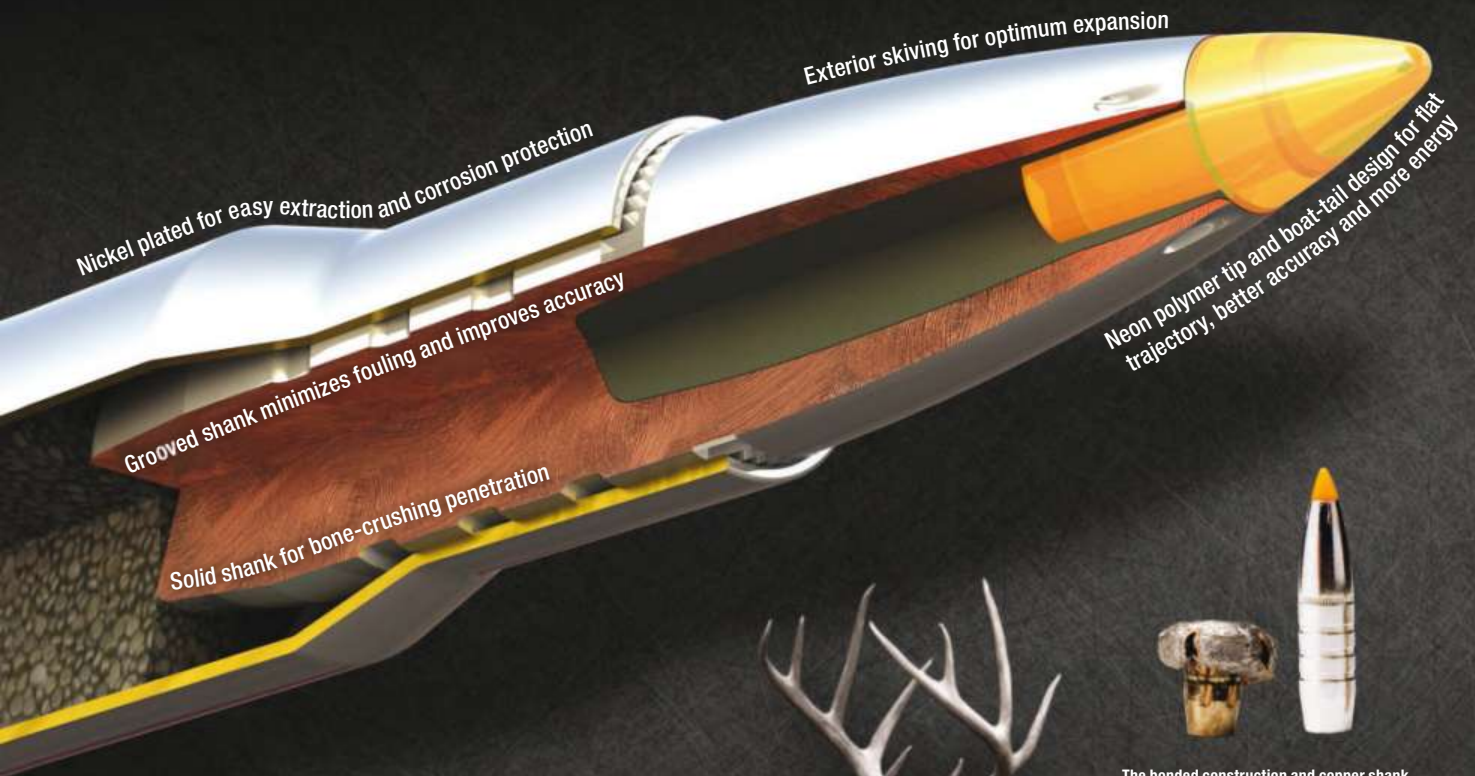


## BRING THE BIG GUNS

When you may have only one shot at a trophy, reliability is key. I had no doubt my Remington Versa Max Waterfowl Pro (\$1,730; remington.com) would fire, even in subzero temperatures. The gas-operated autoloader shoots 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>- to 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-inch shells, allowing quick swaps from duck to magnum loads if a swan comes into range. Oversize controls, including a big bolt handle and safety button, make shooting the gun with gloves especially easy. —D.D.



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ASK PETZAL

# Q & A

**David E. Petzal**  
answers your questions  
about guns, shooting,  
hunting, and life

**Q:** I hunt with an 85-year-old man who is still a great wingshooter and a legend at our club. I've been hinting to him that, God forbid anything should ever happen to him, I wouldn't mind getting his Winchester Model 12 sweet 16. When should I start hinting to his wife?

—JOHN YOTHERS,  
NORTHERN MICHIGAN

**A:** I'd do it after you've gotten your own affairs in order, because I don't think the wife is going to appreciate your overtures one little bit.

**Q:** Suppose you had an Adirondack deer camp and a rack on the wall that held five guns. What five rifles would you fill it with?

—ALAN MACLAREN, UTICA, N.Y.

**A:** First, not all of them would be rifles, because there's more than deer at an Adirondack deer camp. No. 1 would be a rotary-magazine Savage 99 in .250 Savage. No. 2 would be an

## What is the most fun you've ever had shooting?

—MARC PICKERING, PIERRE, S.D.

**A:** Shooting rats in a dump long ago. Nonstop action. Endless violence. Smoke. Stench. And all sorts of other stuff you could shoot the hell out of and no one cared. I'll never see anything like it again.

A.H. Fox side-by-side, one of the new ones, in 16 gauge, because they don't come in 12. No. 3, a wood-stocked Cooper Firearms Jackson Squirrel Rifle in .22 LR. No. 4, my Ed Brown Precision .338, because it's a .338. And No. 5, a Freedom Arms single-action .44 magnum, because you have to have a handgun in there somewhere.

**Q:** Is there any real advantage to having a controlled-feed bolt over a push-feed or vice versa?

—OWEN KINSLEY,  
TOPEKA, KAN.

**A:** In theory, controlled feed is more reliable because the cartridge is in the grip of the extractor throughout the fir-

ing cycle. But it's not infallible; the action has to be set up correctly. Push feed also works flawlessly if it's made right. So practically speaking, there is no great advantage in getting one over the other.

**Q:** If you were not a gun writer, what would you be?  
—MAX SULLIVAN,  
NASHVILLE, TENN.

**A:** I would be a paleontologist specializing in Neanderthal Man. I've been fascinated by them since I was a kid. Their history is one of the great human mysteries, and one of the great human tragedies.

**Q:** I've noticed that a lot of gun writers now refer to ARs as "modern sporting rifles." That strikes me as an idiotic euphemism, not to mention a sort of concession. Aren't ARs ARs; doesn't it say so right on the rifle? And aren't the latest bolt actions also modern sporting rifles?  
—PERRY REYNOLDS,  
CHEYENNE, WYO.

**A:** You are right. MSR is the politically correct version of AR—a mealy-mouthed evasion.

**Q:** I'm thinking about getting a cowboy hat, but I'm not sure I can pull it off. What does it take, exactly?  
—REX HOLMES,  
SOUTH BEND, IND.

**A:** This strikes close to home, because I've had to accept that I can never wear one, and I've given all of mine away. You need a Western face. Unless you look like Clint Eastwood did in the 1970s, you'll just look like a fool in a big hat. **FS**



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RIFLES

## LONG-RANGE REALITY CHECK

Five questions you must ask yourself before pulling the trigger on a distant critter

By Jeff Johnston

**S**O YOU SET UP a refrigerator-size target in your buddy's pasture, and after eight or 10 shots you ding it at 800 yards. Great. But that doesn't mean you're ready to shoot at big game from anywhere near that stupid distance. Not even close. With an animal's life on the line, what you should do first and foremost is get closer. Then if you still feel tempted to shoot from 400 yards or more, you owe it to that critter to take a second and ask yourself the five critical questions below. If you can't answer yes to all, don't shoot.

### 1 DO YOU KNOW YOUR COLD-BORE ZERO?

What separates great riflemen from weekend warriors is their ability to make clean kills on their first shot, time and again. To do that, you need to know your cold-bore zero—the point of impact of your first shot through a cold barrel. Because bullets heat barrels instantly, most rifles shoot to a slightly different POI on the first shot compared with subsequent ones. At normal hunting ranges the difference is negligible, but at 400-plus yards, it can mean the difference between a great shot and a gut shot.

To learn your rifle's cold-bore zero, wait for a cool day with no wind. Shoot one shot, and then wait for the barrel to cool completely before firing the next. Shoot a few groups this way, zeroing your scope as necessary.

### 2 DO YOU HAVE ALL THE DATA?

Precision long-range shooting requires that you enter all the relevant data into your ballistic calculator (or longhand equation), and that data must be as precise as possible. For example, do you know that most ballistics programs assume a default sight-above-bore height of 1½ inches? If the

center of your scope is 1¾ inches above the center of your rifle's bore, your calculations will be off. So measure it. Likewise, you need precise temperature, altitude, and pressure readings in the field. While these values have little effect on a bullet at 200 yards, getting them even slightly wrong at 600 can mean missing an elk.

### 3 DO YOU KNOW YOUR OPTIC INTIMATELY?

You should know, for example, exactly how much one click of your exposed windage and elevation knobs moves the bullet downrange. These values are not always as advertised, so you need to either verify them at the range, or figure out your scope's real-world adjustments by shooting—a lot. Don't assume anything.

If you're using a ballistic reticle, know that most American-style scopes place those dots or hashes in the second focal plane, which means that any change in magnification will alter their subtension values (the amount of bullet drop represented by the marks). The easy way to deal with this is to zero these scopes at their maximum magnification, and then use the ballistic reticle only at the highest power. The superior method is to keep an intricate chart of your scope's subtension values at all magnifications and distances.

### 4 DO YOU REALLY KNOW WHAT THE WIND IS DOING?

The wind is a fickle thing. In mountainous terrain, especially, it is not uncommon to feel a 5-mph left-to-right wind on your face while a 10-mph right-to-left wind blows near the target. Of course you should take a wind reading at the muzzle, preferably with a wind meter. That's the easy part, and sufficient at normal ranges. But when you're going long, you should also take one midway and one near the target. This is more of an art than a science. All you have to go by are a few visual clues, like undulating leaves, grass, and mirage. Knowing how to apply these "measurements" to your hold comes only through long hours of practice—practice of the sort most shooters will never do. And yet for ultra-long range, it's a must.

### 5 CAN YOU GET INTO A GOOD POSITION WITH A SOLID REST?

Rifles react differently to different points of contact. A slightly different cheek weld or a finger placed along-



What separates great riflemen from weekend warriors is their ability to make clean kills on their first shot, time and again.

side the barrel, for example, can change the POI. Therefore, you need to be able to get into a position that's consistent with your practice, which isn't always possible in the field. Don't use your sling if you didn't use it to zero your rifle. And if your field position prevents you from resting your cheek in the exact same place you always do—so that your eye aligns with the scope consistently—adjust the comb as needed or use an aftermarket cheekpiece.

By the same token, don't use a rock for a rest if you zeroed off sandbags. A good rifle rest means at least two points of contact with an inanimate object, so rest the fore-end solidly on your pack or a bipod, for example, and then also use a rear rest. A sock filled with sand or soil is ideal, or a rolled-up outer garment can work. If, after you finally settle in, you see the crosshairs moving due to a shaky rest or a shaky *you*—or if you feel the slightest uncertainty regarding any one of the questions above—*don't* shoot. **FS**

#### GEAR TIP



#### WEARABLE WINDAGE (AND ELEVATION)

Where should you hold for a 550-yard shot in a 12-mph crosswind, shooting down a 15-degree slope, at 8,000 feet of altitude, in the rain? If you can't guess within 8 inches, you need ballistic help. That's where Garmin's Fenix 3 watch (\$500; [garmin.com](http://garmin.com)) shines. In addition to telling time, this smartwatch features a thermometer, a barometer, an altimeter, and a GPS. It is Bluetooth compatible, so you can connect to your phone. You'll still need a wind meter, but with practice the Fenix can make long-range shots less daunting. —J.J.

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### 2. DOUBLE UP

To up your odds of boating a giant, plan on fishing two rods—a quick-strike rig floating a live sucker and a casting outfit tied with a **Suick Thriller**, Bull Dawg, or the local favorite: Shumway's Funky Chicken. You can pick up everything, plus some local intel, at Jenk's Bait & Tackle (715-462-3055) on the way to the lake.

### 3. REST STOPS

When the bite is on, it can be tough to tear yourself away. Stay close to the action with a weeklong vacation at Deer Run Resort ([deerrunresort-hayward.com](http://deerrunresort-hayward.com)), which has a private boat ramp and five cabins right on the Chippewa Flowage. For shorter stays, the Flat Creek Inn ([flatcreekhotel.com](http://flatcreekhotel.com)) offers nice rooms in town.

### 4. BELLY OF THE BEAST

Inside the giant muskie monument at the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame ([freshwaterfishing.org](http://freshwaterfishing.org)) is a museum highlighting the history of angling, including a full listing of record-book fish. Climb the steps to the muskie's mouth for a can't-go-back-home-without-one photo.

### 5. DIVE IN

Tell your fish tales at the Moccasin Bar (715-634-4211), where the jarred eggs next to the beer tap aren't the only things that are pickled. The Moc has colorful locals, a mounted fish (which just happens to be the world-record muskie), and novelty taxidermy—including rodents boxing, banjoing, and bootlegging.

### 6. SAY CHEESE(HEAD)

Cheese curds are a staple in northern Wisconsin cuisine. Order a basket, along with some house-made pretzels, at the Angry Minnow Brewing Co. ([angryminnow.com](http://angryminnow.com)). Wash it down with a pint of River Pig American Pale Ale, brewed on-site, for Wisconsin's take on a well-balanced meal.

## ESCAPES

# ONWARD TO HAYWARD

Take a fall-fishing road trip to the muskie capital of the world **By David Draper**

**I**N LATE FALL, giant muskies go on the feed, gorging on ciscoes and whitefish ahead of the long winter. Anglers soon follow, converging on happy little Hayward to target the area's legendary lake monsters. Now is the best time of year to catch a 40-plus-pound muskie somewhere short of your 10,000th cast. Here's a guide with tips on where to eat, drink, sleep, and—most importantly—fish. **ES**





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HUNTING

## NOVEMBER'S CALLING

Got your buck? Time to get after the year's best coyote hunting **By Will Brantley**

**I**T WAS A DAMP, chilly November evening, perfect for deer hunting actually, but I'd already filled my one buck tag during the early bow season. As a teenager, I had just enough restraint to wait for a deer to turn broadside.

I sat in some brush along the edge of a picked beanfield and started squalling like a tortured rabbit, just like I'd seen on a few instructional videos. In 30 seconds, a coyote popped into the field and came at me on a dead run. When he slowed to a lope at 40 yards, I missed him clean with my .30/06. The next week, I got smart, and after calling for maybe two minutes, I bagged my first coyote, at 30 yards, with a No. 4 turkey load.

Hunting eastern coyotes isn't always like that. Even during a predator hunter's supposed bread-and-butter months of January and February, it's common to go half a dozen sets between responses, sometimes many more. What I didn't know as a teenager—out there only because I was out of deer tags—is that I was learning to call coyotes during the easiest time of year.

### GOOD RECEPTION

My buddy Byron South—one of the country's top coyote hunters—says November is a perfect storm of predator hunting conditions. "I love to bowhunt deer," he told me during a hunt together last winter, "but I try to get my buck killed in October so I can start calling coyotes sooner."

There are more receptive coyotes in the woods now than at any other time. Young-adult coyotes born in spring are now being kicked out of the pack by the alpha animals. Most of them have never heard a predator call and are easy pickings.

The changing landscape makes the

hunting easier, too. If you examine coyote scat in September or October, you'll probably find it as full of berries and persimmon seeds as it is of feathers and fur. Coyotes are omnivores, but the first frosts nip much of the vegetation and soft mast they prefer. When it starts to get cold in late fall, they turn their attention to heartier meals—like rabbits in distress.

### SET FOR SUCCESS

The fundamentals of a coyote-calling set are the same regardless of the calendar. "It's not rocket science," South says. "When you're calling coyotes, sight and smell are

the two key senses you have to beat."

Don't walk across an open field to your setup, and always approach and call into the wind. South is fond of saying his favorite cover scents are "Copenhagen and gun solvent." If a coyote is upwind of you, he can't smell you. If he's downwind, he can. Scent-control efforts don't much matter.

Responding coyotes frequently try to circle downwind of the call, but South says you can minimize that with constant calling. "Most guys call for 30 seconds or so, and then go silent. I don't turn the caller off once it's on. That makes responding coyotes travel a direct route to you. If they do end up circling, it's usually because they think they should be able to see what they're hearing—and by then, you should have a shot. That's also where decoys can really help."

Stick to prey-in-distress sounds right now. Rabbit sounds are tough to beat wherever you're hunting. If you call in a group and kill one, a ki-yi can work for getting a shot at a second coyote. Otherwise, avoid coyote vocalizations. "The pups are being kicked off to find their own territory," South says, "and they're not looking to challenge anything."

Littermates frequently run together during the dispersal period, so be prepared for fast shooting. An AR is the rifle of choice in more open areas, and South hunts with them almost exclusively. In the woods, where opportunities for eastern coyotes often unfold, I like a semiauto shotgun best. I've shot coyotes with a couple of specialty predator loads, including Hevi-Shot Dead Coyote and Winchester Xtended Range HD Coyote, as well as buckshot and turkey loads. The coyote shells are worth the extra money. And once you see how much shooting you'll get to enjoy, finishing your deer season early will be worth it, too. **TS**

### GEAR TIP

#### ELECTRIFY YOUR SETUP

Compared with manual calls, electronic models are louder and clearer, with a much wider range of sounds. More important, most are controlled by a remote, so you can take an incoming predator's focus away from you. The Convergent Hunting Solutions Bullet HP (\$250; [convergenthunting.com](http://convergenthunting.com)) works with a Bluetooth speaker and an app that turns your smartphone into the remote. It can be operated from up to 200 feet away and has an integral, motorized decoy. —W.B.



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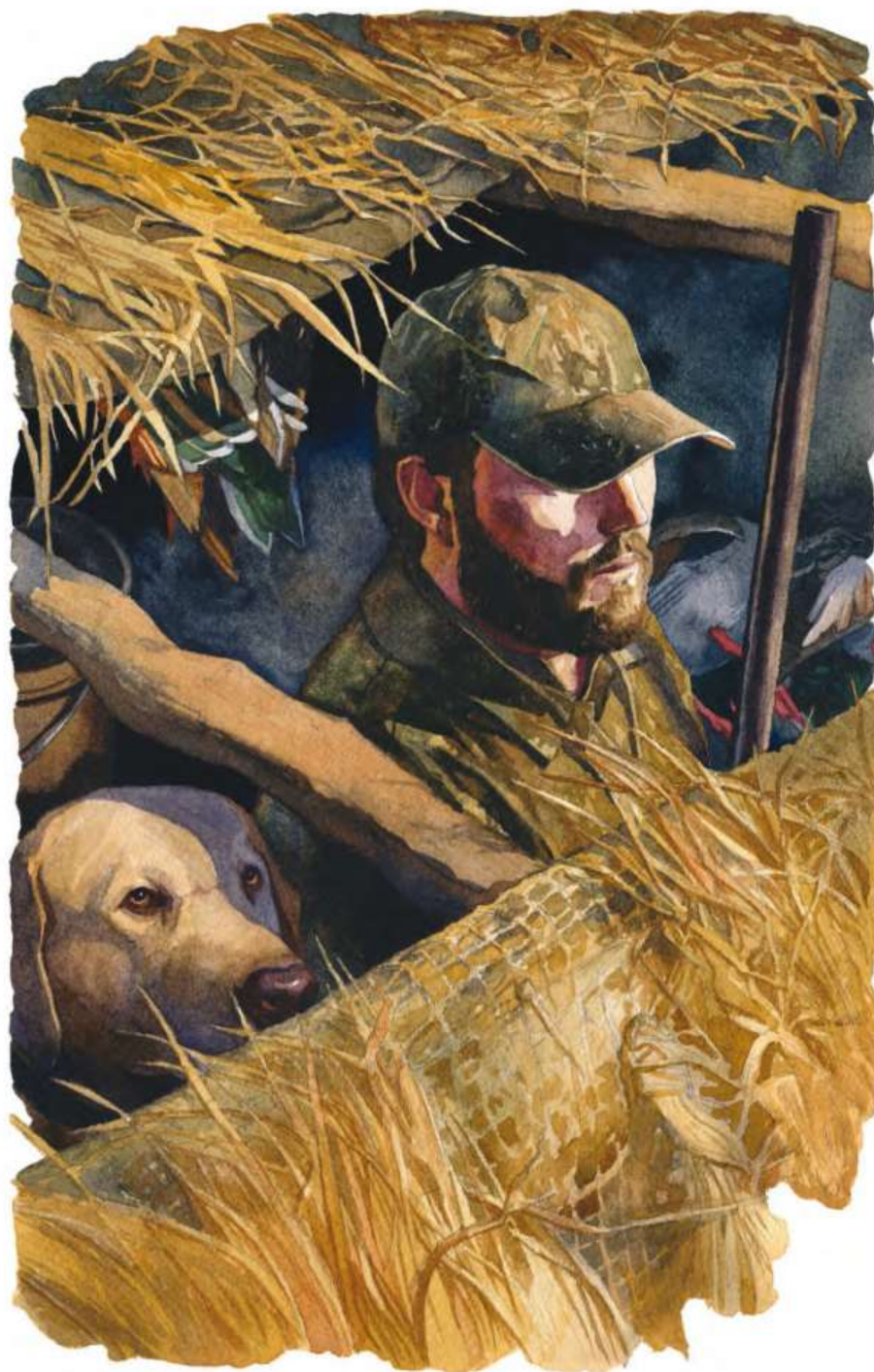




THE TOTAL OUTDOORSMAN

# HIDDEN GEMS

Your duck blind doesn't have to be fancy to be effective. You just need an eye for detail and a bit of ingenuity **By T. Edward Nickens**



I STARTED from scratch three months ago. Pulled off the old burlap, pulled out the old corner stakes. This blind wasn't quite right last season. Too many ducks looked too long and too hard. It seemed fine to me, wedged against a root ball, but I was doing the selling, not the buying, and the blind lacked in customer satisfaction. So on a hot day in August, I tore the blind down to bare mud and hauled in a rubber tub filled with fresh burlap, camo netting, cable ties, tomato stakes, wasp spray, handsaws, and a portable drill and staple gun. I was in no rush. I'd work till I was invisible.

When it comes to blinding up on a duck hunt, I'm a stickler for details. Those hunters who eat Pop-Tarts from the foil wrapper while standing up in the blind just don't get it. We flare more birds than we realize because half of the birds we spook slip off to the side before we even see them. How much does tucking away shell boxes matter? What difference does it make to cut fresh brush? If it makes a 10-yard difference to 10 percent of the birds, that's enough. When it comes to playing hide-and-seek with a black duck on full alert, I don't cut corners.

## BLIND SPOTS

I've hunted from some crazy blinds—crazy good and crazy awful—and I've learned something from each one. In the Northwest Territories, I shot whitewing scoters from hand-built rock blinds that didn't involve a single nail or square inch of netting. I've kicked back in an Arkansas double-decker blind with a cook kitchen and bunk room. What made it work were six guys who didn't move a boot toe when the ducks were overhead. My buddy Scott Wood and I once dug trenches in the mud beside a North Dakota wheatfield puddle, and covered ourselves with mud and stubble. Nothing swanky about that, but when you've got nothing to work with, it's best to do as little as possible. It's about minding the details. Once on a sea duck hunt, my guide anchored a 24-foot white fiberglass boat off a Chesapeake Bay marsh spit, tossed out decoys, cranked up the radio, and told us to load up. He was wearing white Chuck Taylors. We didn't shoot a duck, and didn't deserve to.

The most interesting blind I've hunted from was at the end of a miles-long airboat ride at dawn to an empty arm of the Great Salt Lake, the Wasatch Mountains rising like a mirage in the distance. Thin marsh straggled across the water a few hundred yards away, but otherwise we were surrounded by 5 inches of mirror-flat water.



We lay out in coffin blinds that barely touched the lake bottom, as exposed as dead clams at low tide. But around our coffin blinds were hundreds of plastic silhouette decoys—ducks, geese, and coots with not even an eye dot for detail. In the low sun, each bird cast a shadow image of itself, doubling the appearance of the spread. The coffin blinds were mere black blobs in a dark cloud of 500 other black blobs. Greenwing teal and northern shovellers piled in without a blink. It was a brilliant sleight of hand. We were hiding in plain sight.

That's the trick.

#### VANISHING ACT

Back in the swamp, I was after something a bit more substantial than a magic mirror trick. I'd leased the swamp, so this blind was staying put. I had to figure out a place for the dog, and Jack was old enough now to want to bring along a hunting pal. This blind had to be larger than the last. Before I started pounding in corner stakes, I put my duck glasses on.

*What didn't the ducks like? What was making them nervous? Maybe the blind*

caught too much early sun. If I angled it a few feet toward the south, that would give it another hour in the shade. And most of the birds flew from the north end of the swamp and came in high. From that angle, the blind might have appeared as a dark slit on the end of an island, something off just enough to steer them away. I cut a couple of cedars from the nearby woods to place across the top of the blind once we were in position. And to mitigate the larger box shape, I cut a holly sapling and jammed it into the mud inside the blind, against the back wall. I'd never tried that before. It would stay leafed out all season long, and we could trim any offending boughs on the

first morning's hunt. It gave the blind a 3D look that helped it melt away.

I held off on any hunter comforts: no bench seat, no place to stash a heater, no way to fry bacon. We'd walk in with biscuits, sit on a bucket, and hunker down and hunt.

When I finished I was drenched with sweat and bleeding from cuts and scratches. I stepped back to take a gander. That blind held the DNA of Great Plains pit blinds and Great Salt Lake granite cliffs and green timber hides in the Mississippi bottoms. It was perfect, even though it didn't look like much. In fact, it looked like nothing at all. **FS**

GEAR TIP



#### A HIGH-TECH FOWL-WEATHER SWEATER

Don't let its whitetail hunting pedigree fool you: Sitka's new Fanatic Hoody (\$189; sitkagear.com) does double duty for beaver-pond and timber duck hunters. The Elevated II camouflage pattern is spot-on, and you can vanish into the trees with the integrated facemask inside the hood. The fleece interior is body-mapped and gridded to dump heat on the dark walk to the timber hole, and the flip-over mittens ensure that you're never without a warm trigger finger.

—T.E.N.

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## If You Own a Taurus Pistol A Settlement Has Been Proposed in a Class Action Lawsuit that Alleges Safety Defects

**The Settlement Provides an Enhanced Warranty,  
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*The United States District Court  
for the Southern District of Florida authorized this notice.*

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### WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

There is a proposed class action settlement about alleged safety defects in certain Taurus-branded pistols. This lawsuit alleges that Class Pistols (defined below) may unintentionally fire with the safety in the "on" or "safe" position, and may unintentionally fire when dropped or bumped. The Taurus Companies<sup>1</sup> ("Taurus") stand by the Class Pistols and deny all allegations of wrongdoing and liability.

### WHO'S INCLUDED?

You may be a Settlement Class Member and have rights under this settlement if you are a resident or entity of the United States, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, or Guam and own one or more of the following Taurus-branded firearms on July 30, 2015: PT-111 Millennium; PT-132 Millennium; PT-138 Millennium; PT-140 Millennium; PT-145 Millennium; PT-745 Millennium; PT-609; PT-640; and PT-24/7 (the "Class Pistols").<sup>2</sup> The settlement doesn't include Taurus G2 model pistols.

### WHAT DOES THE SETTLEMENT PROVIDE?

Settlement Class Members may return their Class Pistol to Taurus (with shipping paid by Taurus) and receive up to \$200 per pistol, depending on the total number returned, not to exceed \$30 million. The exact payment amount will be determined after the return deadline has passed and the exact number of returned Class Pistols is known. If you return your Class Pistol for a payment, it will not be returned to you even if the payment is less than you want.

Also, Taurus will provide a free, transferrable lifetime enhanced warranty that will allow owners to submit warranty claims at any time. Taurus will pay shipping and inspection costs, and will repair or replace the pistol as necessary. Taurus will also provide safety training to all Settlement Class Members. Taurus will pay for notice and administration, a class representative award of up to \$15,000, and Class Counsels' attorneys' fees and costs up to \$9 million, payable over 4 years.

### HOW DO YOU ASK FOR A PAYMENT?

You must submit a claim form and return your Class Pistol to receive a payment. Shipping is prepaid by Taurus. You can only submit a claim form *after* the settlement is finally approved and any appeals are concluded. This date is not yet known. You may register now through the website to get information about when you can submit a claim form. Visit the website to determine when you can submit a claim. If the Court approves the settlement and there are no appeals, the claims period will run from approximately February 24, 2016 until June 23, 2016.

### WHAT ARE YOUR OTHER OPTIONS?

If you don't want to be bound by the settlement, you must exclude yourself by **December 14, 2015**, or you won't be able to sue, or continue to sue, Taurus about the legal claims in this case. If you exclude yourself, you can't get money from this settlement. You may object to this settlement by sending an objection by **December 14, 2015** and you may have to give a deposition. Objections and opt-outs will be public record, even if they contain the identity of Settlement Class Members. Detailed information is on the website. If you do nothing, you will still receive the lifetime enhanced warranty and safety training but will not receive a payment, and you will still be bound by the settlement.

Before money is paid, the Court will hold a Final Approval hearing on **January 20, 2016**, to consider whether to approve the settlement. You may attend the hearing, but you don't have to. The Court will also consider the request for attorneys' fees and costs and an incentive award. The motion for attorneys' fees, costs and awards will be on the website.

**This is only a Summary. For detailed information**, call toll-free 1-(844) 528-0180, or visit [www.TaurusCarterSettlement.com](http://www.TaurusCarterSettlement.com), or write to Carter v. Forjas Taurus, c/o Heffler Claims Group, P.O. Box 230, Philadelphia, PA 19107-0230.

<sup>1</sup>The "Taurus Companies" means Forjas Taurus, S.A., Taurus Holdings, Inc. and Taurus International Manufacturing, Inc. The Taurus Companies are the Defendants in the class action lawsuit.

<sup>2</sup>The "PRO" series of each model is included.

[www.TaurusCarterSettlement.com](http://www.TaurusCarterSettlement.com)

 CAMPFIRE

**KEVIN BUSHNICK**  
HAYWARD, WIS.

Fishing for muskies  
on Moose Lake.



### CONSERVATION

## HEROES OF CONSERVATION

A muskie fisherman creates an all-volunteer program to get thousands of kids involved in the outdoors **By Mike Toth**

**I**N 2008, Bushnick was volunteering for an overnight youth fishing event when a young son of one of the fathers on the trip was asked what it was that he wanted most. The boy replied, "To go fishing with my dad, but he's always working," and then started crying.

The experience so moved Bushnick that in 2010 he founded the Youth Conservation Alliance, which is an all-volunteer organization with the overall goal of teaching kids about the outdoors through hunting and fishing.

The group's multifaceted ap-

proach includes fishing days with an emphasis on muskies, field and camping trips, wild-life and environmental study programs, school seminars, and other events that strive to involve the entire community.

The YCA now has several hundred volunteers and supporters who have reached well over 10,000 kids through the fishing and educational events.

"When a kid walks up to you and gives you a hug and says, 'Thank you,' that's cool," says Bushnick, 51, a former computer networking specialist. "That's what this is all about."

FS



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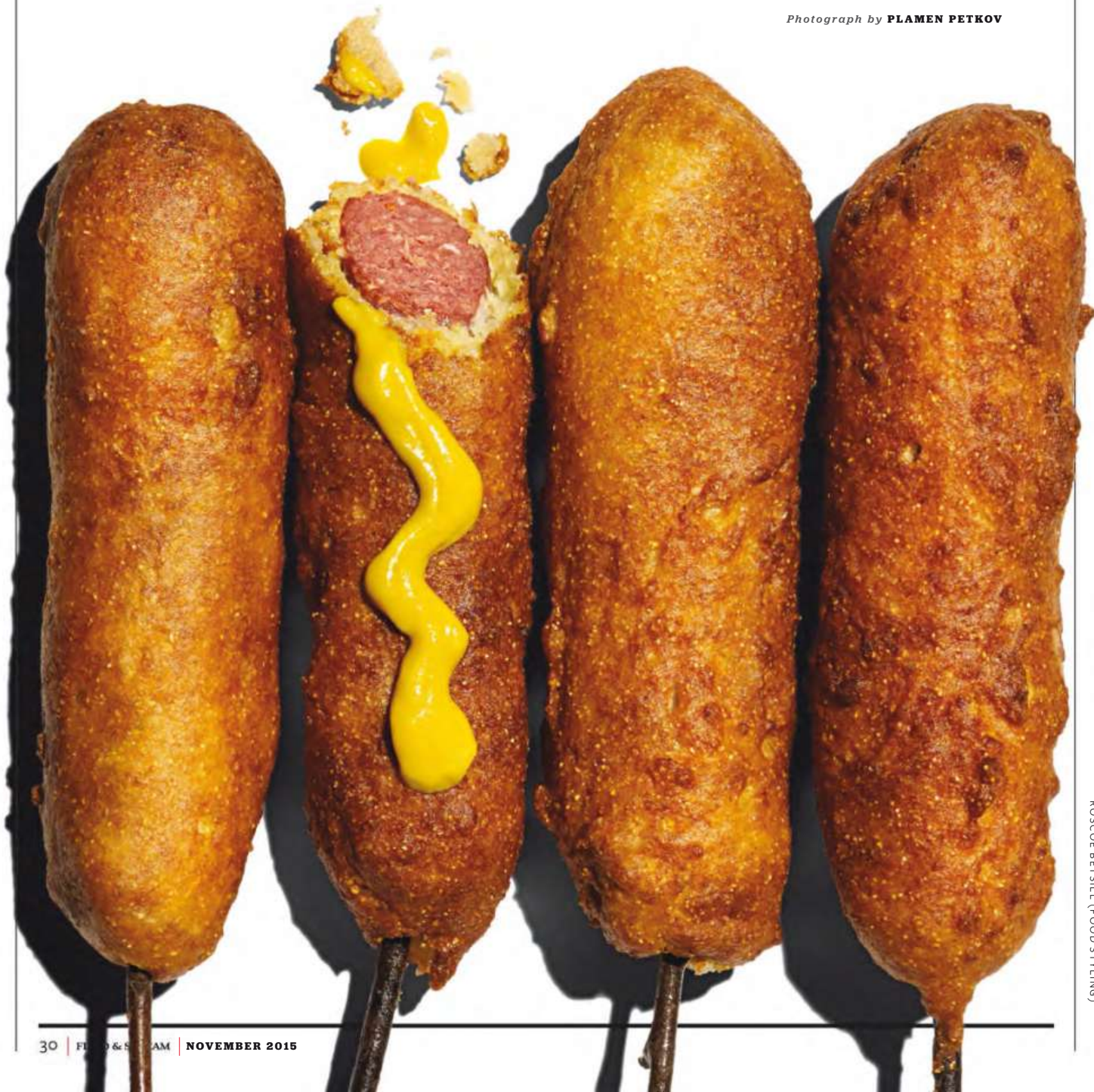


# ELK CORN DOGS

Give your big-game sausage a crowd-pleasing (i.e. deep-fried) twist **By Jonathan Miles**

This state-fair knockout actually comes from the Four Seasons Resort in Vail, Colo., where executive chef Kevin Erving serves his elk corn dogs. The process is a multiday one, so a measure of ambition helps. If you run out of ambition, however, you can skip the battering and just grill or broil the sausages instead—serving them as hot dogs rather than corn dogs, in other words. Either way, you're tasting franks at their wildest.

*Photograph by* **PLAMEN PETKOV**



ROScoe BETSILL (FOOD STYLING)



## INGREDIENTS

2 lb. elk (or venison), cubed  
1½ lb. fatback or pork shoulder, diced  
1½ Tbsp. kosher salt  
2 tsp. pink curing salt  
1 Tbsp. Colman's mustard powder  
2 tsp. paprika  
1 tsp. ground coriander  
1 tsp. black pepper  
2 Tbsp. minced garlic  
1 tsp. celery seed  
3 Tbsp. light corn syrup  
Hog casings, soaked  
1½ cups flour  
½ cup yellow cornmeal  
1½ tsp. salt  
1 Tbsp. baking powder  
1½ Tbsp. sugar  
1 cup whole milk  
4 Tbsp. cornstarch  
Oil, for deep frying

**1** Make the sausage: Put the elk and fatback or pork into the freezer for a while, until it's about 35 degrees—very cold but not frozen. Using a meat grinder, grind the elk and fatback through the fine die. (Alternatively, you can process in a food processor, in small batches, until finely ground.) Combine the mixture with the kosher and pink salts and 1¼ cup cold water and cure in the refrigerator, covered, for at least 24 hours and up to 48 hours.

**2** Add the mustard, paprika, coriander, pepper, garlic, celery seed, and corn syrup and combine well. Transfer the mixture to the freezer and chill until it's brittle but not frozen. Working in small batches, process the mixture in a food processor until it's smooth and tacky.

**3** Stuff the mixture into the soaked hog casings and twist into 4-inch links. Poke each link once with a skewer or fork and refrigerate overnight.

**4** Smoke the sausages at 200 degrees until they reach an internal temperature of 140 degrees. (Alternatively, you can put them on

a roasting pan in a 200-degree oven and roast them to the same internal temperature.) Refrigerate until ready to fry.

**5** Make the batter: Combine the flour, cornmeal, salt, baking powder, and sugar in a medium bowl. Add the milk and stir, with a wooden spoon, just enough to combine; lumps are O.K. Allow the mixture to rest for about 10 minutes.

**6** Bring the oil to 350 degrees in a deep fryer or Dutch oven.

**7** Batter the corn dogs: Transfer some of the batter into a tall drinking glass. Scatter the cornstarch onto a plate, and one by one, roll the sausages in the cornstarch until lightly dredged, shaking off any excess. Slide the sausage onto a wooden skewer or chopstick and then dip into the batter in the glass, allowing any excess to drip off. Immediately place the battered sausage into the hot oil and fry until the coating is golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Repeat with the remaining sausages, refilling the glass as needed, and serve the corn dogs hot. **Serves 12 or more**

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# SPORTSMAN'S NOTEBOOK

## OWN THE POINT

Be ready—not rattled—when that covey of bobwhites explodes right at your feet

By T. Edward Nickens



A bird dog locked on point has done its job. The rest is up to you. Walking in to a point requires a quick analysis of shooting scenarios and safety considerations. Wade Meacham, head guide and dog trainer at North Carolina's Webb Farm ([thewebbfarm.com](http://thewebbfarm.com)), details the game plan for holding up your end of the bargain.

→ **WATCH THE BACK** When one dog sees another dog on point, it should point as well. That's called backing a point, and it prevents the second dog from bumping the birds. Try not to walk too close to or in front of a backing dog; you could break its concentration.

→ **HOLD THE LINE** "Approach the point together with your hunting partners, and stay in line so that no guns are too far forward," Meacham says. Your safe shooting arc extends straight ahead and out 90 degrees away from the opposite gunner. For safety, decide beforehand if the group will shoot birds that fly behind the line.

→ **END GAME** Be prepared for the tail-end Charlie—that one bird that frequently sticks around after the flush. Have your shells accessible. "The guys who kill the most birds," Meacham says, "are often the ones who reload quickly."

→ **FORWARD THINKING** Getting your feet into a good position is tough in heavy cover, but if possible, shift your weight forward so you'll lean into the rise. That way, recoil has minimal effect on your second shot.



## QUAIL KIT

*Must-haves for the  
bobwhite hunter*



### [1] DAN'S HUNTING GEAR DUCK SHIRT

The *duck* refers to the cotton cloth on the shirt's torso, but the brier-proof arms, shoulders, and chest let you push through the nastiest cover. \$55; [danshuntinggear.com](http://danshuntinggear.com)



### [2] GUNNER KENNEL'S G1 KENNEL

It's ridiculously overbuilt (it'll stop a shotgun blast at seven paces), but it protects your most valuable hunting tool: your tail-wagging pal. \$485; [gunnerkennels.com](http://gunnerkennels.com)



### [3] CHIPPEWA 17-INCH BRIAR PITSTOP SNAKE BOOT

Many snake boots are stiff and chafing. These are not, and I pushed them hard. They're waterproof and very comfortable. \$310; [chippewaboos.com](http://chippewaboos.com)

→ **FIGURE THE WIND** Don't just jump out of the truck and start hunting. "The easy place to enter a field might not be the best place," Meacham says. You want the wind in your face or crossing, never at your back. "It's worth taking the dogs through the woods for 10 minutes to enter a field with a favorable wind."

→ **PLAN YOUR SHOT** Most birds will fly to heavy cover, winging with the wind if possible. Anticipate the flight path and visualize where you're going to stop for the shot. "You don't want to post up in brush where you can't swing or with a big tree close," Meacham says. "Birds know to put a tree between you and them pretty fast."

→ **ONE AT A TIME** Most people rush their first shot. "Quickness counts," Meacham advises, "but you do have some time, so tell yourself as you walk up: Relax. Find one bird and shoot one bird." Don't switch birds until the first one falls.

→ **TRUST THE NOSE** The human nose has about 6 million olfactory receptors. A dog's? Up to 300 million. "Always trust the dog, and work every point like it's going off live," Meacham says. In the right conditions, a good dog can point a bird from 50 yards away, but most birds will be within 10 yards.





BEFORE

**NOTE:**  
Collectors like to see knives in "as is" condition. If yours is rare or collectible, consult an expert before restoring.

AFTER

## PROJECTS

## POCKET REHAB

TURN A RUSTY FOLDER INTO AN HEIRLOOM

> By Michael Pendley

→ New pocketknives are shiny and razor-sharp. But old, beat-up knives tell the story of the person who carried them. If you own such a knife, here's how to clean it up without wiping away all of its history, so you can pass it down.

**[1]** Start with a thorough cleaning. An old toothbrush and a can of Birchwood Casey Gun Scrubber will remove most of the dirt and crud. Reach deep into blade channels with a stiff nylon bristle brush. Use a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser to scrub

away years of ground-in gunk in the handle.

**[2]** Reshape broken tips by removing metal from the back of the blade to regain the original contour. The easiest way to do this is by stroking it over a coarse stone in a

circular motion. Avoid grinding wheels or belts, as they can overheat the blade and alter the temper of the metal.

**[3]** To remove surface rust, dip the blade in CLR Rust Remover and buff it with a rotary

tool equipped with a fine brass wire brush.

**[4]** To polish the blade, switch the wire brush to a felt polishing wheel. Dip the wheel into polishing compound and set to work on the blades until they shine. Finish the blades

with a new polishing wheel and a metal paste polish like Flitz.

**[5]** Add a drop or two of oil to the joints and finish the job by sharpening the blades. If you aren't one of those gifted folk who can hone a blade on a

stone until it's shaving-sharp, use a kit like those from Lansky or a belt sharpener like the Work Sharp System.

**[6]** Pass it on. When you are finished with your knife, make sure it goes to a young person who will continue the story.





## FLY SHOP

## COLD-WEATHER PATTERNS

THREE NYMPHS THAT WILL QUICKLY THAW THE APPETITES OF FROST-BREWED TROUT > **By Erin Block**

**Tungsten Zebra Midge**

SIZES 18–20

Arguably the most productive winter pattern ever created, this fly sinks quickly relative to its size when tied with a tungsten beadhead. The Zebra is versatile; it works well in swift and still water. Use it as a dropper below a dry fly or indicator, or in tandem with a heavier nymph pattern.

**JuJu Baetis**

SIZES 20–22

Created by Charlie Craven, this fly is made to imitate a bluewinged olive nymph for notoriously picky trout. While the beadhead version catches fish, I prefer the unweighted JuJu. It's the perfect fly to sink below a dry pattern in shallow moving water, and when tied on a larger hook, it also kills in still water.

**Black Beauty**

SIZES 22–24

Pat Dorsey designed this lightly weighted version of the Zebra Midge specifically for fishing Colorado's South Platte, which is a tailwater. It shines in long, slow tailwater runs anywhere in the country, and when rigged below a tungsten nymph or split shot, it floats through feeding lanes with a convincing natural drift.

→ For anglers who have thick skin and patience, the looming cold months offer less crowded trout rivers and lakes. Everything from the water to your casts to the fish may move slower in winter, but what doesn't slow down are the bugs. Midges are always hatching somewhere, usually during bankers' hours from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M., when the sun peaks. You may see surface takes, but more often than not, it's the driven nymph that hooks more chilled-out trout. These three patterns are musts for your winter arsenal.

**Dark Secrets**

Humans may boast opposable thumbs, but trout are able to see ultraviolet light—that is, beyond violet, which is

the highest frequency in the visible spectrum for our eyes. Water absorbs light according to wavelength. Longer wave-

lengths, such as red and orange, are absorbed quickly near the surface; whereas the shorter wavelengths of green,

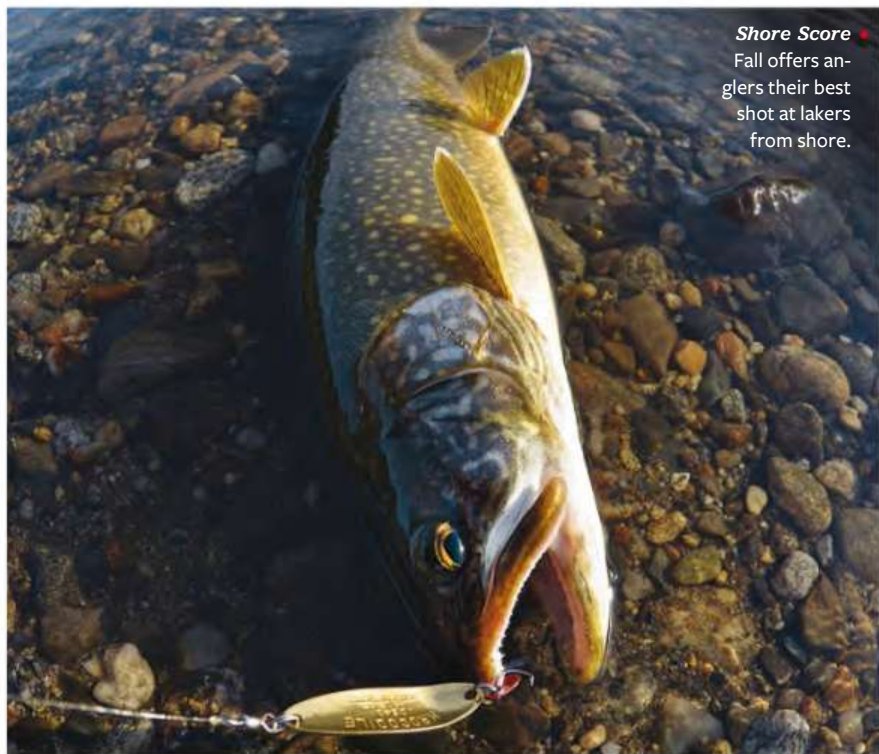
blue, and violet are visible at greater depths. Fish evolved to see movement and contrast at the expense of great

detail, so in low-light winter conditions, a high-contrast fly, such as one in black and silver, is usually most effective. —E.B.

**Ice Flows**

Small, dark nymphs are must-haves for success with trout in winter.





**Shore Score**  
Fall offers anglers their best shot at lakers from shore.

**TIPS****GROUND-FLOOR LAKERS**

YOU DON'T NEED DOWNRIGGERS—OR EVEN A BOAT—TO HOOK BIG LATE-FALL LAKE TROUT

► **By Mark Modoski**

→ Fishing for lake trout usually goes hand in hand with big boats, downriggers, and cannonball-size trolling weights. Most of the year, motoring to the deep water these fish inhabit is the only way to get them on the line. But if you're not armed for big-water battle, you're in luck, because there's no better time than now to hook lakers from shore. As water temps creep closer and closer to the freezing point, lake trout emerge from the depths to feed shallow—putting themselves in your casting range. All you need to connect is a far-casting rod, the right lure, and a little savvy.

DAVID W. SPOK

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1

**MAP QUEST**

A lake contour map is a must for success at catching lakers with your feet on land. Locate a stretch where deep water cuts in close to the shoreline. Although lake trout can be anywhere in the water column at this time of year, hitting a spot where the fish have fast access to deep water is a smart move. Focus on sandbars and rocky points along your target stretch, as these bottom structures hold more heat, thereby warming the water and attracting the baitfish the lakers are hunting.

2

**LONG RANGE**

The farther you can cast the better, so opt for a medium- to heavy-action spinning rod that's at least 8 feet long. The rod should be rated to bomb lures weighing as much as 1 ounce. I prefer to spool with 8- to 12-pound-test monofilament for its abrasion resistance in rocky areas; however, braid will earn you a little more casting distance. No matter which line you choose, lakers are wary, so adding a 2-foot fluorocarbon leader to lower visibility is never a bad idea.

3

**EARLY TO RISE**

Lake trout feed closest to shore early in the morning, and then slide deeper as the sun gets higher. Start out casting smaller, lighter spoons or spinners such as a Blue Fox Vibrax, close to shore. These lures hit with minimal splash, so **they're less likely to spook trout** in skinny water. As afternoon approaches, switch to a Little Cleo, which is heavier. The higher the sun, the farther you should cast. At sunset, scale back your lure weight and start fishing closer again.



**Take a Shine**  
The Little Cleo has enough weight to reach lake trout from the bank.

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## GEAR SMARTS

## SMOKE ON THE WATER

HOW TO BUILD A DEADLY DUCK LOAD FOR YOUR BLACKPOWDER SHOTGUN > *By David Draper*

→ Modern waterfowling is heavy on face paint and autoloaders. Bring some class back to the blind with a blackpowder shotgun. Picking up a mallard from the decoys is never more satisfying than when you're surrounded by a cloud of white smoke. Most replica shotguns, like the Classic Side-by-Side (shown) made for Cabela's by Pedersoli, are safe for use with steel shot, too. Here's how to create an excellent pattern.

**Powder Down**

Opt for **Goex FFg black powder**, since modern blackpowder substitutes can generate too much pressure and blow the pattern. One hundred grains is usually about right for a duck load, but you may experiment with 10 grains on either side of that to get the best results.

**Cushion the Blow**

A thin **piece of cardboard** over the powder creates a tight gas seal to push the shot out of the barrel, while the **fiber wad** protects the shot cup from the initial blast of ignition.

**Get a Cup**

A **plastic shot cup** makes for tighter patterns, but just as important, it protects the barrel from the abrasion of steel shot. Use the ramrod to seat it firmly against the wad.

**Go 50-50**

As a rule, the best load for all blackpowder shotgunning is equal measures, by volume, of shot to powder. For ducks, fill the powder measure with 100 grains of **No. 4 steel shot** and pour it down the barrel. Gently tapping the buttstock against the ground will settle the pellets into the shot cup.

**Seal the Deal**

Slip another **piece of cardboard** down the muzzle and press it firmly against the shot. This serves the same purpose as a shotshell crimp, sealing out the elements and preventing your duck load from rolling out the end of the barrel. Finally, place a **percussion cap** on the nipple, and you're ready to smoke some feathers.



## COLD STORAGE

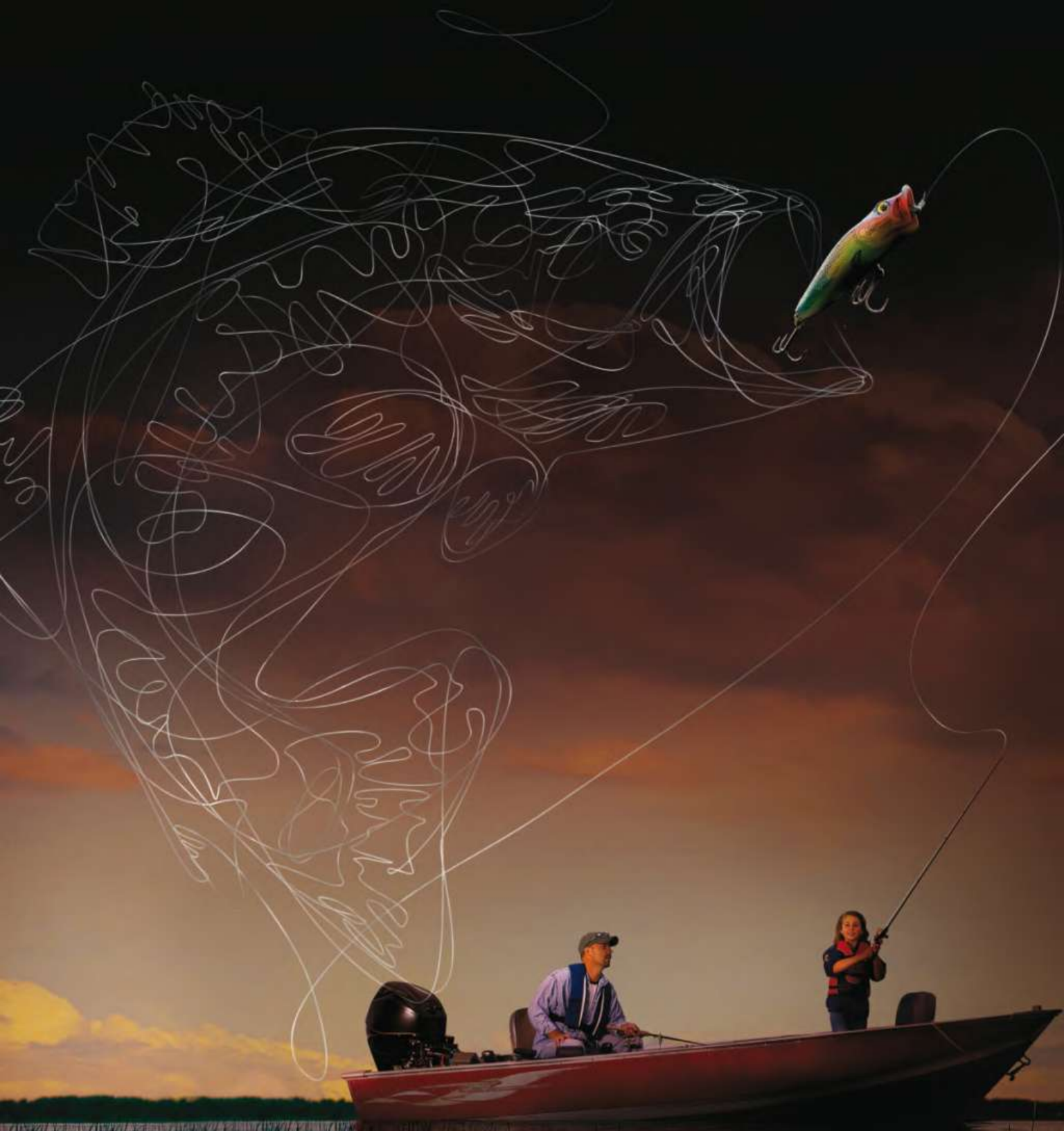
CHILL YOUR FISHING LINE FOR A LONGER SHELF LIFE

● Bulk spools of fluorocarbon and high-quality monofilament aren't cheap, but the reason you pay up is to have a few seasons' worth of line on hand when you need it, right? Rather than let your investments roast on a garage shelf, or sit in a cabinet in your dank basement, store them in your freezer.

Over time, exposure to moisture, sunlight, and seasonal temperature swings can degrade monofilament and fluorocarbon. The cold, dark, humidity-free environment where your Hot Pockets and fish fillets live, on the other hand, provides a stable, dry climate that can keep a spool of line—or fly tippet—fresh indefinitely.

—JOE CERMELE





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## EXPERTS

## TREED TALK

THE HARDWOODS BECOME A SQUIRREL DOGGER'S PLAYGROUND THIS TIME OF YEAR. THREE EXPERTS DISH ON THEIR FAVORITE DOGS AND BEST TACTICS > **By T. Edward Nickens**

→ Squirrel hunting with dogs has all the excitement of old-time coon hunting, but it's easily managed on public lands and smaller forest tracts. Below, three squirrel-dog breeders share their thoughts on the best dogs for treeing bushytails—and the best way to get a clear shot at a squirrel hiding in the tall timber.



FEIST

## LEE MOORE

*phoenixsquirreldogs.com*

## Where I Hunt

The Mississippi Delta.

## My Kind of Dog...

...is a little **feist**, 20 to 25 pounds. A small dog is easy to handle, and you can fit more than one in a dog box. I think most feists use their eyes more than a cur, and tree the squirrel a little quicker. I don't like a real loud, hard-barking dog, either. I'd rather hear what the other hunters are saying and where they're moving.



LADNER BLACKMOUTH CUR

## Potshot Trick

Use a green laser pointer and run that dot right onto the squirrel. Even if your buddy can't see the squirrel, you just say: "You see my dot? Shoot it."

## PAUL HILLIS

*hillisblackmouthcurs.com*

## Where I Hunt

Texas riverbottom.

## My Kind of Dog...

...is a **Ladner black-mouth cur**. Their lines go back more than 200 years. They vary in size up to 90 pounds, but I like a 40- to 50-pound dog. Bigger dogs will tire out faster, and they tend to go around thickets that a little dog will go

through. Blackmouth curs have amazing wind-ing ability. They'll walk on their two hind legs, like a kangaroo, with their nose in the air trying to smell a squirrel.

## Potshot Trick

Hunt with three or four people. One guy jerks on a vine or shakes bushes to get the squirrel to move. Everybody else surrounds the tree. Somebody will get a shot.

## CHUCK LOUDIN

*mountainstatekennels.com*

## Where I Hunt

West Virginia mountains.

## My Kind of Dog...

...is a purebred **original mountain cur**. I'm a hound guy from way back, and I like the similarities between treeing walkers and original mountain curs. Curs tend to range out a bit farther, and they run a track by scent. I like watching them work a good track. When they tree, they're up on the tree, staying tight and barking plenty, like a hound.

## Potshot Trick

Treed squirrels tend to move suddenly, so keep the scope on your .22 set to low power. That way, when he dashes out of your crosshairs, you can track him until he stops again.



ORIGINAL MOUNTAIN CUR



**Bait School** •

Watch how fleeing shad behave to pattern the biggest fall largemouths.

**SKILLS****READING SHAD**

BEFORE LAUNCHING A FULL-ON FALL BASS ATTACK, TAKE SOME TIME TO STUDY THEIR PREY

> **By Dave Wolak**

➔ Come late fall, one of the surest ways to score the last big bass bites of the season is to get yourself up a creek. While the main lake may be chilly, creek arms are likely to be a few degrees warmer, and therefore magnets for shad schools and the bass that eat them. What makes the game so fun is that it's visual; shad fly through the air as largemouths attack, boiling and splashing as they feed. But the error most anglers commit is to move in on the first shad school they find and cast right into the fray. Quite often, you spook more fish than you catch. Patience is a virtue here, and if you've got some, my plan will keep you in the action longer.

**1****POST UP**

Before casting, find an area away from where you expect to see shad that gives you a good vantage point. Now just stay put and watch. Eat a sandwich if you're bored, but spend at least 20 minutes observing the shad from a distance. Once they give up their location, break out binoculars to get a closer look. Assume the bait—and any bass attacking them—will change their behavior to some degree when you get in close with the boat. This is why it's so important to get a read on the activity before taking action.

**2****DIVIDE AND CONQUER**

As you watch the schools, separate the creek into quadrants, noting which one has the most shad. You can assume this quadrant will also hold more bass. Pay attention to how the shad react to everything from a bass attack, to a boat wake, to a bird swooping overhead. Does the school dive? Push to the bank? Slide downstream? The idea is to figure out their timing and direction so you can be one step ahead. If the school spooks when you get into casting range, you want to throw where you think they're going to pop up again.

**3****HIT GROUND ZERO**

Smaller bass will chase the school around, but big bass often pick an ambush point and wait for the buffet to come to them. Once you've figured out where the bulk of the shad are hanging, and how they're moving, look for places likely to hold a big bass. This can be anything from a laydown tree, to a boulder, to a dock. Pay attention to what happens when the shad pass one of these ambush points. If they get smashed, fish the attack spot first. White spinnerbaits, silver crankbaits, and natural-colored jerkbaits are all great lure choices.





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If you hunt out of a deer camp with friends and family, you know that it's one of the highlights of the year...if not *the* highlight.

And in the evenings, you probably sit around the camp table with family and friends and discuss all kinds of deer-hunting related things: Should we do anything to improve the deer herd? Are we hunting the right way? How do we get that wallhanger that no one can seem to pattern? Can anybody beat the practical joke that we played on the new guy last season?

Some of these questions you may be able to answer. Others, maybe not. That's why we called on our deer-hunting experts to answer them for you. These hunters know more about deer and deer hunting than most anybody—and their answers may help you put more bucks on your deer pole this year. Good hunting!



# MICHAEL HUNSUCKER



Michael Hunsucker, President and Executive Producer of *Heartland Bowhunter*, has been involved with the show since its inception in 2007. Mike took his first P&Y whitetail at the age of 16. Since then he has taken numerous trophy whitetails with archery equipment and has documented a majority of them on film. From scouting nearly every day in the summer to shed hunting in the spring, Mike is in the field nearly every day of the year.

## **What steps do you take for scent concealment, and how much do you think it matters?**

When it comes to scent control, anything and everything you can do helps. Whether it's spraying down, washing clothes, or dressing in the field it can't hurt! Hunting the wind is the key regardless of how cautious you are, however.

## **All else being equal, how high do you place your treestands for bowhunting?**

We try to hang around 20 feet. It's high enough to be hidden well and still have a good shot angle at deer. Every set-up is different, though, depending on the area and surroundings.

## **When is the absolute best time to use a deer decoy?**

My favorite time to use a decoy is during the seeking phase in late October and early November. The first few does have come into estrus and the bucks are cruising, looking for that one receptive doe.

## **How do you kill a nocturnal buck?**

It's very difficult. Usually the rut is your best bet to catch a big buck slipping up and moving in daylight. You can do it earlier or later in the year, but moving in tight to where they are bedding can be risky.

## **How much time do you invest in one stand location during the rut before moving to another?**

It all depends on the wind direction. We definitely have our go-to spots that we hunt during the rut, but we still try not to over-hunt areas, even during November.

## **You're in your stand looking at a 190-inch non typical, a 170-inch typical, and a 165-inch clean 8 pointer. Which one do you shoot?**

Easy. Whichever gives me the shot first! If they all give me a shot, though, I'm shooting the 190. Bigger the better!

## **You can have one deer call to use all season. What is it? (No cheating with the multi-sound, all-in-one calls, either.)**

A grunt call, no doubt. Deer are vocal animals and grunting is more common than most hunters realize.

## **What is your one must-have piece of gear for deer hunting?**

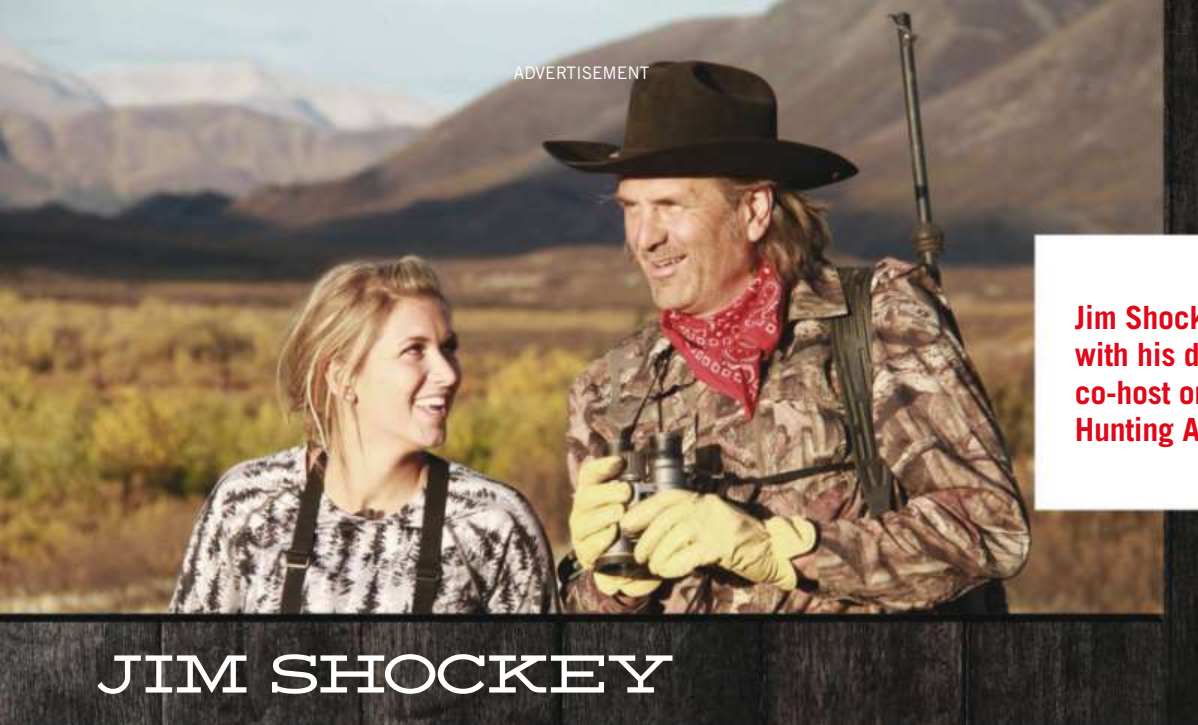
For bowhunting, hunting the wind is crucial, and having a wind indicator to check the wind is extremely important. If the wind isn't right, don't be afraid to back out and move stands.

## **Tell us about the best hunt you've ever had at your deer camp.**

I killed the biggest buck of my life in North Dakota on opening day of season. It was a drought year and we were concentrating on hunting water sources. We set up over a little waterhole and had six bucks come in together. I was able to arrow the biggest one still in full velvet, scoring 175.







**Jim Shockey in the field with his daughter Eva, a co-host on Jim Shockey's Hunting Adventures**

## JIM SHOCKEY

Jim Shockey has been an award-winning outdoor writer, wildlife photographer/videographer, wilderness guide and outfitter for nearly 30 years. He is accomplished in archery, muzzleloader and rifle, and has traveled worldwide in pursuit of hunting adventures. Jim has attained 13 Boone and Crockett all-time record entries and is the first hunter to complete the "North American super slam" and "ultimate slam" using only a muzzleloader.

### **What steps do you take for scent concealment, and how much do you think it matters?**

I'm terrible at doing anything proactive to keep from smelling like I've been hunting in a showerless camp for a month straight! So I just try and work the wind, rather than mask my smell.

### **All else being equal, how high do you place your treestands for bowhunting? How high is too high?**

I prefer ground blinds. I don't trust trees.

### **When is the absolute best time to use a deer decoy?**

When you are hunting a place that the deer can see the decoy from a long way away, such as from a ground blind on a snowy hill with the decoy against the white snow. A buck will be able to see the decoy from a distance and can be rattled in easily.

### **You can have one deer call to use all season. What is it? (No cheating with the multi-sound, all-in-one calls, either.)**

I use my voice. Our giant Saskatchewan whitetails have deeper grunts than most calls made today.

### **How do you kill a nocturnal buck?**

Poachers use spotlights, but hunters have to rely on patience, lots of it. Eventually every buck, no matter how nocturnal, makes a mistake and the hunter just has to be there when the buck walks by his stand in the middle of the day.

### **It's the heat of the rut, and you're in a bow stand. Is your bow on a hanger (within easy reach) or in your hand? Why?**

On a hanger. Otherwise you can't sit still enough. Every hunter will wiggle and change hands and get cramps and sore arms from holding their bow. If it's not comfortable, the hunter won't sit still long enough. And you can always pull your bow off the hanger when you know the buck isn't looking.

### **How much time do you invest in one stand location during the rut before moving to another?**

I will sit for 23 days straight as long as the wind is right. I've done exactly that to kill my biggest buck ever, a 190-plus giant from Saskatchewan.

### **You're in your stand looking at a 190-inch non typical, a 170-inch typical, and a 165-inch clean 8 pointer. Which one do you shoot?**

The non typical every time. I'm a sucker for junk!







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# THE DRURY BROTHERS



Terry and Mark Drury have been producing cutting-edge, state-of-the-art hunting videos since 1989. The brothers, both serious hunters of true trophy deer, have spent thousands of hours in the whitetail woods pursuing their craft and have amassed a body of knowledge about hunting tactics, land management, and deer behavior that is nearly unmatched today. Here are their answers to questions that many deer hunters ask them today:



## What is your one must-have piece of gear for deer hunting?

We would probably say a Reconyx trail camera. It helps us scout and is always running! By knowing what deer we have on a farm and what their patterns are, it greatly helps our odds in trying to hone in on one!

## What's the coolest deer camp tradition you've ever heard?

We've seen some places where everyone who went to a camp had to shoot an arrow into an old tree stump if they missed a deer. You'd be surprised how many arrows were in that stump!

## The field you're hunting is full of deer when shooting light ends. How do you leave without spooking them?

A lot of times we will sit until dark and try to quietly climb down with the cover of darkness. Another trick is to owl hoot or use a coyote call. That will spook deer off the field, but they won't know it was a human that was there.

## How do you kill a nocturnal buck?

That's the million-dollar question. It is very tough to convince that nocturnal buck to come out during legal shooting hours. One thing that can help you out is a major cold front coming in. That deer has to get up and fill his stomach full of the essential fats he needs to survive through the harsh conditions of a season. The rut is always another great opportunity as well. Many bucks are up on their feet and moving in ways they don't normally do. You just need to be in the right place at the right time.

## It's the heat of the rut, and you're in a bow stand. Is your bow on a hanger (within easy reach) or in your hand? Why?

During the rut it can be a tricky thing. If you aren't prepared, you can very easily miss a shot opportunity. Deer are moving quickly and it is almost impossible to get them to stop sometimes. Your best bet is to have your bow ready and very close at hand. If you are hearing movement off in the timber, you better pick up that bow and be ready to go!

## How much time do you invest in one stand location during the rut before moving to another?

It all depends on the wind and the movement. Very rarely will we sit a spot, even if it's the best spot, if we don't have the right wind direction. To some extent, that helps make the choice for us.

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## How do you kill a nocturnal buck?

Religiously use trail cameras. Find a place where he travels regularly and pattern his movements with a trail camera. Then get a satellite map of the area and figure out where his bedding area is and where he is heading to eat. Nocturnal deer stay in and around the bedding area until after dark, so become really familiar with that area. When the rut kicks off, be there. Be willing to sit all day and you'll catch him slipping up.

## What's the coolest deer camp tradition you've ever heard?

I'm a huge fan of initiating new hunters and making them part of this culture, so I love seeing a young man or woman with a streak of blood from their first kill worn proudly on their cheek.

## When is the absolute best time to use a deer decoy?

For me it's during the seeking phase of the rut, just before the rut kicks into overdrive. Bucks are looking hard and on their feet all day. Combined with calling and rattling, a decoy can be deadly.

## All else being equal, how high do you place your treestands for bowhunting? How high is too high?

Most of my treestand sets are 18 to 25 feet high, depending on shooting lanes and the available cover. If you set a stand much higher than that, I believe the shot angles are too steep and you run a higher risk of single lung hits. Too high is a matter of opinion, but I think 30 feet is the highest you'd ever need to go.

## My camp likes to drive deer all season. Some of us feel that it pushes deer away from our area, while others think it's the only way to see deer. Who's right?

That depends a lot on the size of your plot of land. If you have enough ground where deer can find a sanctuary, you're probably OK. If not, you are probably making your neighbor's hunting season pretty awesome.

## What's the one absolutely quickest way to increase overall buck quality on my deer camp hunting property?

Don't shoot small bucks, pure and simple. Make sure they have available food all year and let them grow. In just a couple of years, you'll see big changes in the makeup of the heard.

## What's the absolute best deer camp card game?

Texas Hold 'em. It'll let you know which guys in camp are good at lying—and those are the guys you really want to grill about what deer they saw that day.

## How much time do you invest in one stand location during the rut before moving to another?

That all depends on activity. If I know the rut is rolling and I'm not seeing or hearing chasing after one sit, I'm gone. I know the deer are rolling somewhere, and during the rut it's about finding that magic spot, so if it's dead where I am—I'm gone.





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# — THE BEST DAYS OF — *THE RUT*

YOU KNOW THAT THE BIGGEST BUCKS WILL BE TEARING UP THE WOODS, SMASHING HEADS, AND RUNNING DOES EVERYWHERE. THE ONLY QUESTIONS ARE: HOW WILL YOU HUNT AND WHEN? INSIDE ARE KILLER TACTICS FOR EVERY RUT PHASE, PLUS THE SEVEN DAYS YOU MUST BE IN YOUR STAND

By SCOTT BESTUL



LANCE KRUEGER

**DOUBLE TAKE**  
A 19-POINT OHIO GIANT  
AND HIS MATE.



## THE BEST DAYS OF THE RUT



### 7 BEST DAYS OF THE RUT

Mark your calendars. Here's when you need to take off work and get in a treestand.

#### Day 1: October 27

This day will kick-start pre-rut activity across much of the country, particularly in the Northeast, North-Central, and Great Plains regions, as bucks start trolling hard in search of that first hot doe. Farther south and west, bucks will be increasingly active within their core areas. While it may seem early for mid-day hunting, the full moon will make that 11-to-1 window a killer time to be out if it's cold.

#### Day 2: November 6

There's bound to be a doe or two popping in the northern regions today, and you can bet that the most experienced studs will be cruising to find them. Meanwhile, across the West and into parts of the southern regions, bucks should be focused on seeking does. All across the country, the moon will be up in the daytime sky for much of the day; activity should be high, notably so in the morning.

#### TAKE A DIGGER

AN ONTARIO BUCK WORKS A STAGING-AREA SCRAPE BEFORE HITTING THE GRUB.

## RUT PHASE: SEEKING

### TROPHY TACTIC: STAGE AN AMBUSH

• **The Action:** Ever watch a zoo lion pace the perimeter of his cage in an endless circle? That's how bucks are behaving right now; they're prowling the confines of their home range, laying down rub and scrape lines, nosing around food sources, looking for the first hint of a hot doe. At no time are bucks more active, yet more predictable. **The Hot Zone:** While bucks are seeking does, they're mainly doing so near the usual key feeding fields, and the true brutes will be reluctant to step into the open until the last sliver of light. That makes staging areas the top big-buck spot now. Walk field-entry trails 50 to 70 yards into the timber, and you'll soon find an area bombed with rubs and/or scrapes.

This is where the biggest buck is blowing off steam before heading out to harass does on the field.

**The Hunt Plan:** Deer of all sizes will use the staging area. To get a legal-light shot at Bubba, you need to find the trail he uses to reach the spot. If there are scrapes, start there, and look for a faint trail, likely marked by a big rub or two, leading toward a rugged or thick-cover bedding area. Set your

stand downwind of this trail. But not too close. There's a good chance that a wary buck will circle slightly downwind to scent-check the scrapes before

moving in to work them over. Give yourself a makeable shot to the main trail while also giving him a little space to circle without busting you.

**Tip:** After you set up, rattle lightly and make a few grunts. The big one is likely bedded

within hearing distance, and the sounds of sparring bucks may goad him to his feet just a bit early.

### ANY-BUCK TACTIC: FIND THE LICKING BRANCH

What most small to decent-size bucks really want right now is to be around other deer, and with the testosterone dump hitting them, they'll bomb straight out into a field or oak flat to harass does. So locate the best entry trails, and then search nearby trees for an active licking branch. These are used by every deer in the herd, so your buck (or the doe he's intent on finding) will hit it eventually, no matter where the deer enters the food source. Set up in a tree with good cover; you're going to have a lot of eyes and ears around you. **Tip:** If your buck hangs up out of range, tip over a can call. Bleats are a curiosity builder and won't spook does feeding nearby.



### REGIONAL SEEKING-PHASE DATES

When can you expect to see bucks start cruising? Our Rut Reporters researched fetal-aging, fawn-drop, and other data to determine a range of dates when each rut phase is most apt to be active in seven regions. Here's the seeking-phase breakdown:

- \* **NORTHEAST:** Oct. 25–Nov. 1
- \* **NORTH-CENTRAL:** Oct. 25–Nov. 1
- \* **GREAT PLAINS:** Oct. 25–Nov. 1
- \* **WEST:** Oct. 29–Nov. 5
- \* **MID-SOUTH:** Oct. 30–Nov. 6
- \* **SOUTH-CENTRAL:** Nov. 6–13
- \* **SOUTH:** Nov. 12–19





# RUT PHASE: CHASING

## TROPHY TACTIC: HUNT THE HUB

● **The Action:** First comes the doe, panicked and panting. Then the bucks—one, two, three—on a conga line weaving between the trees, with a colossus bringing up the rear. You'd better be ready. The chasing phase is, hands down, the most exciting week of the deer sea-

son. Bucks will run at almost every doe they see. No wonder many hunters confuse the chasing phase with the peak of the rut. While the breeding apex is actually several days off, this is when you want to be in the woods.

**The Hot Zone:** When bucks start chasing, does start hiding, and they go where they feel safest: their bed-

rooms. As a result, bucks spend this phase bombing from one doe bedding area to the next, looking for a receptive mate. If you don't know the specific sites where does bed on your property, look to ridge ends, low benches, CRP, brushy cover on gentle terrain, and dry areas in swamps or marshes. Doe bedding areas themselves can

be hotspots now, but even better are terrain funnels that connect several such sleeping quarters.

**The Hunt Plan:** A perfect example is a main ridge that splits into two or three ridge-end bedding areas. Sit at the split—or hub—and you'll see any buck coming in or going out. These types of terrain funnels are critical now because of the chaotic nature of the chase phase; both fleeing does and chasing bucks will often ignore trails, but terrain features force them to move through specific spots. Set up on the downwind side of the hub and prepare to sit all day.

**Tip:** Any spot that funnels bucks in from multiple directions is apt to have one or more trails to the downwind side. To prevent bucks from using these trails and busting you, drop some large branches over them, forcing bucks to take a route that gives you the advantage.

## ANY-BUCK TACTIC: SIT FOR A BOOTED BUCK

Dominant bucks zealously guard the zone surrounding a close-to-estrus doe, often running off subdominant rivals, including some pretty good bucks. In order to find another doe that hasn't already attracted a giant's attention, these booted bucks cruise areas where they can see, hear, or smell other deer. One of their fa-



## REGIONAL CHASING-PHASE DATES

- ★ **NORTHEAST:** Nov. 2–9
- ★ **NORTH-CENTRAL:** Nov. 2–9
- ★ **GREAT PLAINS:** Nov. 2–9
- ★ **WEST:** Nov. 6–13
- ★ **MID-SOUTH:** Nov. 7–14
- ★ **SOUTH-CENTRAL:** Nov. 14–21
- ★ **SOUTH:** Nov. 20–27

vorite spots is a perimeter trail surrounding a main food source.

To find this hot run, start at the food and walk any good entry trail back until you find an intersecting trail that parallels the field edge. This runway will likely be faint compared with the entry trail and marked by rubs and possibly scrapes. Subdominant bucks will cruise a circuit of these perimeter trails throughout the day, searching for other deer. Hang a large, comfortable stand just downwind and stay put as long as you can.

**Tip:** This is a great time to get aggressive with bleats, grunts, and loud rattling. Any buck that's been run off by a rival will be eager to find other deer and apt to run right in to your setup. And if that dominant buck is aggressive enough, there's a chance he'll break off from his doe for a moment to investigate the commotion you're making.



**THE CHASE SCENE**  
A MONTANA BUCK PUSHES A  
DOE ONTO THE OPEN PRAIRIE.



★  
7 BEST  
DAYS OF  
THE RUT  
—

## Day 3: November 11

### 2015 FIELD & STREAM BEST DAY OF THE RUT

The deer woods will be on fire today. Most of the country is on the cusp of peak breeding—the magical time when some breeding has started, and there are new does coming into heat by the hour. Much of the southern regions will see ramped-up pre-rut action, too. And the moon will be up all day.





# THE RUT CLUB

OUR READERS TAGGED SOME HUGE BUCKS ON LAST YEAR'S BEST DAYS. SO WE DROPPED IN AT THE HOMES AND CAMPS OF FOUR TO HEAR THEIR STORIES AND HELP SHOW OFF THEIR TROPHIES

By SCOTT BESTUL ✕ Photographs by ACKERMAN + GRUBER



## ↑ ✕ THE FROST GIANT

✕ **Hunter:** Shawn McDonough ✕ **Location:** Buffalo County, Wis.

✕ **Score:** 194 $\frac{3}{8}$ " gross B&C ✕ **Date:** Nov. 7, 2014

First McDonough's cousin missed the buck in 2012, when it was a 160-class 3-year-old. "His arrow nipped a branch and sailed off," says McDonough. Then McDonough almost put his tag on the giant in 2013. "He chased a doe right past my stand—at just 10 yards—but I couldn't get him stopped." So, heading to the same area around 11 A.M. on a blus-

tery, cold Nov. 7, 2014, McDonough knew exactly what deer he was after. But by 3 P.M. he hadn't seen a thing. "Then it started to sleet, and the wind began whipping like crazy. I decided it was time to bail."

As he reached for his quiver to attach it and lower his bow, he glanced at a trail behind him. "There he was, standing just 20 yards away, and looking in the opposite direction." The buck went only 60 yards at the shot and piled up. "It was unbelievable. At three o'clock I was ready to bomb out of the woods. At four I was calling a buddy to help me drag out my dream buck."





↑ ✱ **THE BOONE-COUNTY BOONER**

✱ **Hunter:** Bo Dylak ✱ **Location:** Boone County, Ill.

✱ **Score:** 178" gross B&C ✱ **Date:** Nov. 22, 2014

Dylak missed the opening day of Illinois's 2014 shotgun season. "My sister is a straight-A student, but I'm not," he says. "So when the opener fell on a Friday, she got to go hunting, and I had to go to school." Come Saturday morning he couldn't wait to get out and asked his dad where he should hunt. "He told me to sit the Meat Stand. It's a good spot to take a

doe, and our freezer was empty." When the first doe showed, Dylak got his gun ready. "I was about to shoot when I suddenly spotted a nice buck trailing her." The trophy stopped, but Dylak missed. "He just stood there for a second, trying to figure out where the first shot had come from, and my second one hit him." When Dylak finished the buck with one more shot, it became the first Booner ever taken in Boone County.

Back at school on Monday morning, the principal called Dylak to the office. "I thought I was in trouble for sure," he says. "Turned out, he just wanted to congratulate me on my buck."





↑ **\* THE HALLOWEEN MONSTER**

**\* Hunter:** Clint De Boer **\* Location:** Gregory County, S.D.

**\* Score:** 187<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" gross B&C **\* Date:** Oct. 31, 2014

In 2013, De Boer and his buddies kept seeing a big buck come off the neighbor's property and enter a creekbottom on their farm to bed. "We put him in the 160s," De Boer says. The next spring, he was hanging a stand in the bottom. "I looked down and saw a matched set of sheds not 20 yards away. That's when I knew we'd underestimated the buck in a big way."

Come fall De Boer, a volunteer fireman, decided he'd wear that stand out until he killed the buck or it moved. By Halloween morning, he'd sat the spot 13 times and was starting to feel burned out. "It was 9 degrees with a brutal wind, and I was freezing my butt off by 9 A.M." Like McDonough, he was almost ready to bail. "Then I looked up, and the buck was walking right to me." It closed to 11 yards, then looked right up at De Boer. "As he started to walk away, I drew, grunted to stop him, and shot." It took all he and a friend had to drag the beast out. "We found out why later—he field-dressed at 270 pounds."





# † × THE BACKYARD BRUTE

× **Hunter:** Mike Chamberlain × **Location:** Washington County, Minn.

× **Score:** 1987/8" gross B&C × **Date:** Nov. 13, 2014

Out raking leaves in his yard one afternoon, Chamberlain looked up to see a huge buck walking by. "I shook my head," he says. "Here I am within bow range of a monster, during archery season, with only a rake in my hands."

In his suburban neighborhood, Chamberlain has access to 5 acres but hunts mostly on his own 1½-acre lot. "It's a perfect pinch point; the deer

come off a big park nearby, walk between my neighbor's house and driveway, and funnel right through the yard." Which is exactly what the big 13-pointer did on the afternoon of Nov. 13.

"When I first saw him, I thought, That deer has a branch stuck on his head." Then he realized what buck he was looking at. "The rest is a blur. He came in, and I thought I hit him well." The deer ran a short way but stopped at around 30 yards, wobbling. "By then I'd settled down. I nocked another arrow and made an even better shot. It was the complete opposite of ground shrinkage. The closer I got to him, the bigger he got!"





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## THE BEST DAYS OF THE RUT



**PINNED DOWN**  
A TANK-BODIED 8-POINTER  
KEEPS A CAREFUL EYE ON HIS MATE.

## RUT PHASE: PEAK BREEDING

### TROPHY TACTIC: STALK A STUD

• **The Action:** Hunters call this phase the lockdown. At its zenith, 30 to 40 percent of all does will come into estrus over a three- to five-day period, and since most herds have a higher ratio of does, mature bucks have no problem finding mates. An experienced breeder will push a ready doe into an odd and remote spot, where competition from other bucks is greatly reduced, and that breeding pair may spend up to three days together. In other words, you won't see a lot of buck activity, especially in your usual spots. All of this makes peak breeding one of

the toughest times to kill a buck.

**The Hot Zone:** Right now, the big guys will have their mates sequestered in secluded covers, such as an old farmstead, a brushy fencerow, a small cat-tail marsh, even an overgrown rockpile in a plowed field. The best place for you to be is where you can see as many of these oddball locations as possible, whether that means an observation stand, a high spot

where you can glass, or your truck.

**The Hunt Plan:** Glass meticulously, looking for part of a bedded deer. Be patient, as the buck or doe will likely stand at some point to feed or stretch. Once you have a breeding pair marked, plan a stalk using terrain and cover to hide you. If it's still bow season where you hunt, try stalking behind a lightweight silhouette decoy. When you get inside shooting range,



you can simply wait for the buck to stand (which could take hours) or get him up with a grunt or snort-wheeze. If you choose the latter, be ready to shoot fast.

**Tip:** Before you stalk, pick a landmark near the buck—a tree, rock, or tuft of weeds—and use it as reference to keep yourself on course.

### ANY-BUCK TACTIC: READ THE SIGNS

Always a step behind the big boys and famous for figuring does out too late, younger bucks are at

sea now. They'll be looking for other deer where they've had success before: primary scrapes. Dominant bucks between mates will also check these spots now. Look for freshly disturbed dirt and a licking branch. Set up to shoot right to the sign, as younger bucks are apt to head straight there without circling.

**Tip:** Any buck—big, medium, or small—without a mate will be on his feet throughout the day looking, which makes this phase prime for midday hunting.



7 BEST  
DAYS OF  
THE RUT

### Day 4: November 14

Sure, it's peak breeding across much of the nation's center, but in many of those states, firearms season has just opened. That influx of hunters will get locked-down deer moving, and even the wariest giant will follow his doe into harm's way. In the West and across much of the southern regions, including parts of Texas, deer will be on their feet much of the day, searching for and chasing does. Expect some jaw-droppers to hit the ground.

### Day 5: November 21

Again, hunters in the South and across much of Texas should see some outstanding buck action today, as those regions approach peak-breeding dates. Meanwhile, hunters in the West, Great Plains, North-Central, and Northeast regions will see the first hints of pickup breeding. Pressure from gun hunters should also keep bucks moving. The moon will be up at dawn and won't set until midafternoon, so the morning hunt should be stellar today.

### REGIONAL PEAK-BREEDING DATES

- ★ **NORTHEAST:** Nov. 10–20
- ★ **NORTH-CENTRAL:** Nov. 10–20
- ★ **GREAT PLAINS:** Nov. 10–20
- ★ **WEST:** Nov. 14–24
- ★ **MID-SOUTH:** Nov. 15–25
- ★ **SOUTH-CENTRAL:** Nov. 22–Dec. 2
- ★ **SOUTH:** Nov. 28–Dec. 8



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# RUT PHASE: PICKUP BREEDING



**LONELY TRAVELER**  
WITH ONLY A FEW DOES  
LEFT UNBRED, DOMINANT  
BUCKS RUN BIG NOW.

## TROPHY TACTIC: WAIT ALONG THE WATER

● **The Action:** With some of the most frenzied action weeks behind you, it's easy to feel deflated now and just give up. Don't do it, because the pickup-breeding phase may be the very best time of the year to target and tag a true giant. While lesser bucks are exhausted from running, and tired of getting their clocks cleaned, the big guys are getting

a second wind and scouring the woods for a relative handful of unbred does.

**The Hot Zone:** It's time to think beyond the confines of your hunting property. Your goal is to find a macro funnel. Bust out a topo map, aerial photo, or satellite image of a large area surrounding your ground. First, circle the major food sources and potential bedding areas on your area and beyond. Then identify major travel ar-

teries connecting them; think waterways, fencelines, hedgerows, and ridge systems. With mature bucks traveling big, they are bound to move through these macro funnels.

**The Hunt Plan:** One of the best macro funnels is a wooded riverbottom, especially one fed by other creeks. Not only does this make a perfect travel artery for cruising bucks; it also provides bedding, browse, and water for

other deer. It's like a highway connecting every motel and restaurant in an area. Hang a stand in a multi-trunked tree and bring entertainment, such as a book or smartphone. You'll probably have to wait a while for your buck, but when he shows, he'll be a stud.

**Tip:** If the creek is shallow, approaching along its course mitigates your scent trail, and the banks often hide your silhouette. If the waterway is navigable, use a canoe or johnboat to get to your stand (and get your buck out).

## ANY-BUCK TACTIC: SEEK HIDDEN FOODS

While the big boys are still seeking mates, other bucks, including some good ones, are switching their focus to

staying alive. Most gun seasons are open now, and that influx of hunters is making bucks extra wary. But even freaked-out deer have to eat; so your job is to find a good, hidden food source. Does—avoiding large feeding areas to dodge harassment from bucks—seek secluded groceries now, too, and may pull in additional bucks.

If you've planted hidey-hole food plots near thick cover, this is the time to hunt them.

Otherwise, look for hidden foods such as acorns, soft mast, or small cuts overgrown with browse. Slip in around noon, do some quick scouting, and set up as quietly as possible, as deer may be bedded nearby.

**Tip:** Be extra careful about calling and rattling now. Even a good-looking 2- or 3-year-old buck may be tired of fighting at this stage. If you need to get a buck's attention, try a bleat call first.



✱

7 BEST  
DAYS OF  
THE RUT

## Day 6: November 26

If you're serious about tagging a true giant, pickup breeding is your time—and that's the phase deer are squarely in today in all but the southernmost regions. Put off your Turkey Day feast until after dark, and you'll have even more to be thankful for. Hunters farther below the Mason-Dixon Line will start to see the beginnings of this activity, too.





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## THE BEST DAYS OF THE RUT



7 BEST  
DAYS OF  
THE RUT

### Day 7: December 6

It's full-on pickup-breeding time for monster bucks in much of the South and South-Central, including much of Texas. What's more, colder weather should goad deer into spending more time at major food sources. In the more northerly regions, the second rut will be starting in earnest now. Today's afternoon moonrise will make unbred does and fawns move toward the hottest food sources a little earlier—and the bucks will be right behind them.

### Bonus Dates: December 26 and January 2

In parts of the Deep South and Texas, the rut is not only much later than the rest of the country but highly variable from place to place. That said, make sure you're hunting on these two days, which combine great breeding activity with peak movement and feeding times for whitetails in general. Assuming your season is still open, take a little break for the holiday celebrations, but then get back out there.

—S.B.

#### THE STALKER

A MINNESOTA MONSTER  
CHECKS A LATE-CYCLING  
FAWN AND YEARLING DOE.



## RUT PHASE: SECONDARY RUT



#### TROPHY TACTIC: HUNT THE LATE SCRAPE

● **The Action:** O.K., let's get this out there: When we talk about the secondary rut, many hunters imagine a re-wind of November. Not gonna happen. This time around, only about 10 percent of the herd's does (mostly fawns and yearlings) will come into estrus. But suppose you knew just where you could find one of those females. You'd have an

opportunity to see her suitors, right? And at least one would likely be a bruiser, right?

Well, a great thing about the secondary rut is that finding that single hot doe is actually not that difficult.

**The Hot Zone:** I've kept track of this over the years, and I've seen slightly more mature bucks during the secondary rut than I have during the main event. The reason is simple: colder temperatures. A drop in the mercury forces deer to eat more. That, plus exhaustion from the rut, makes winter deer get very serious about food. Still, wary, mature bucks will often hang up just off a field or food plot until dark. So, just as during the seeking phase, identifying their favorite late-season staging area becomes critical.

**The Hunt Plan:** Most hunters pussyfoot around late-season food sources, afraid that they'll bump deer if they move into the woods. And while it is smart to be careful, remember that you usually don't have to penetrate the timber very far at all—usually 30 to 50 yards—to find a late-season staging area. Again, what you want to see are fresh scrapes. Heavy trails may be pounded through the snow nearby, but ignore them and set up right

on the buck sign. This setup is especially deadly right after a fresh snowfall, when bucks are eager to re-open scrapes.

**Tip:** A cold snap now will get a buck on his feet, often before sunset. If you want that wall-hanger, you need to bundle up, grit your teeth, and get out there.

#### ANY-BUCK TACTIC: PLAN A HUNGER STRIKE

All deer are ravenous now. The younger the buck, the less likely he is to be distracted from

his hunger by hunting pressure or late-cycling does. If you just want a decent buck (with a chance at a stud), set up right on the best food. Rather than committing to a single entry trail farther off the feed, creep to the edge or set up right in the groceries with a ground blind. Bale blinds like those made by Redneck (redneckblinds.com) can be placed in the middle of a picked cornfield and hunted immediately. A snow-camo blind like the Super-Star 2 (luckys huntingblinds.com) can be set up in scant cover at a field's edge. This improves your odds of getting a shot and keeps you warmer.

**Tip:** If ice-glazed snow makes it impossible to sneak quietly into a stand or blind, use snowshoes to tromp a path at midday. You may spook a deer or two. But give them a day to settle, and they'll be back.

#### REGIONAL SECONDARY-RUT DATES

- ★ **NORTHEAST:** Nov. 29–Dec. 6
- ★ **NORTH-CENTRAL:** Nov. 29–Dec. 6
- ★ **GREAT PLAINS:** Nov. 29–Dec. 6
- ★ **WEST:** Dec. 3–10
- ★ **MID-SOUTH:** Dec. 4–11
- ★ **SOUTH-CENTRAL:** Dec. 11–18
- ★ **SOUTH:** Dec. 17–24



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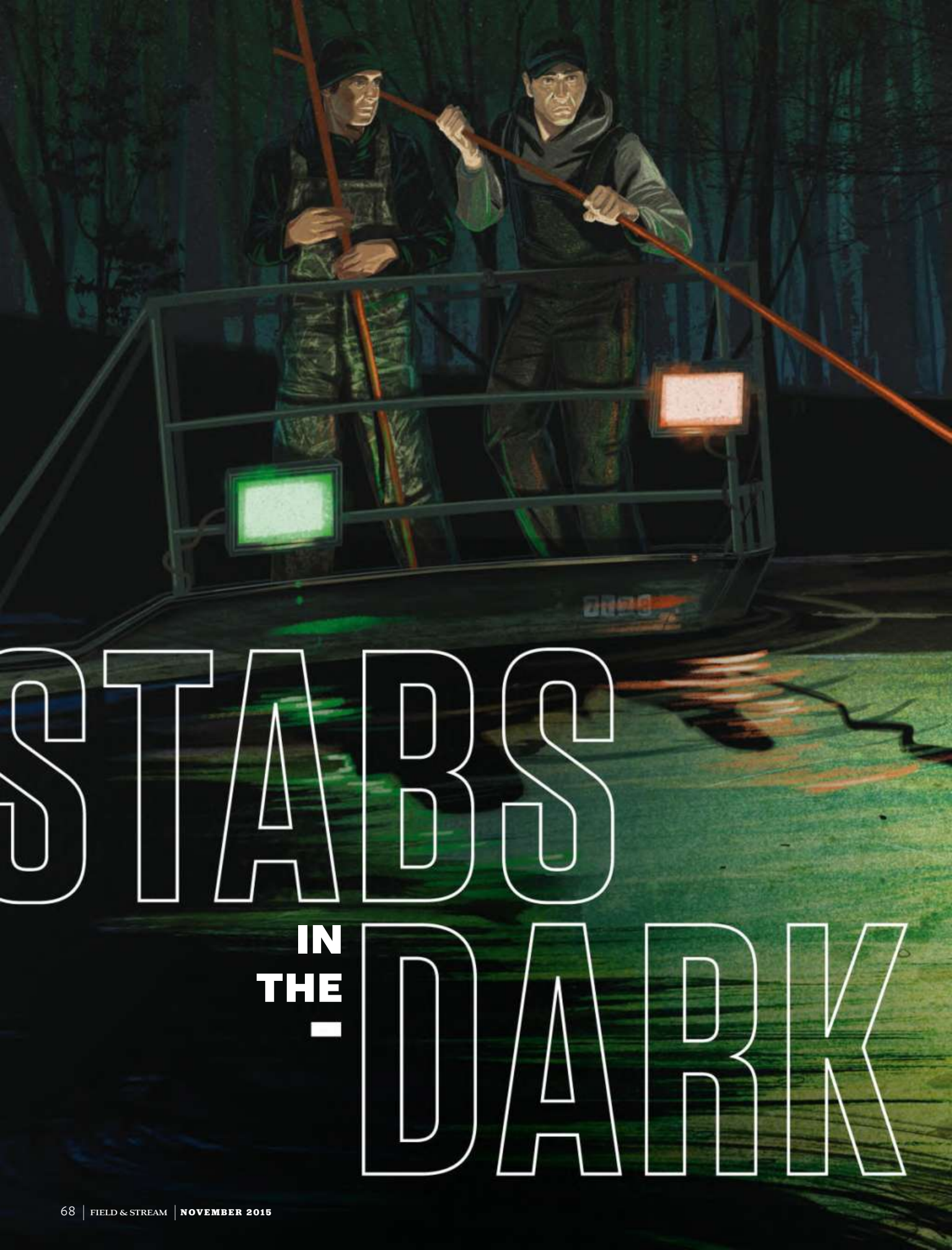
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# STABS IN THE DARK



EVERY FALL, A CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION TAKES PLACE  
ON OZARK STREAMS—GIGGING FOR SUCKERS AT NIGHT.  
THE AUTHOR TAGGED ALONG WITH A FEW LOCALS WHO  
HAVE PERFECTED THIS DECEPTIVELY CHALLENGING SKILL.  
THEY ALSO THROW A HELL OF A BONFIRE PARTY

By T. EDWARD NICKENS

Illustration by JONATHAN BARTLETT





# THE RIVER IS ON FIRE, LIT WITH 4,000 WATTS OF SPOTLIGHT BOLTED TO THE BOW. I WATCH THE MEN ON THE FRONT DECK, A PAIR OF SILHOUETTES AGAINST A RIVER THAT GLOWS GREEN, BLUE, AND YELLOW, LIKE A WITCH'S CAULDRON.

Each figure holds the long shaft of a wicked gig, the barbed tines fat as cigars. The man on the right suddenly tenses, shifts forward, and slides the tip of the 14-foot-long pole into the water. The boat shifts in pursuit, the gigger on the bow deck tracking his target. Then, without warning, he jabs the gig down, into the green light. It's a miss. He pulls the gig up, makes a second jab, then a third. I watch, spellbound. My turn is coming.

"That fish has him dancing," says Brad Reed, who's sitting beside me, manning the outboard tiller. Reed is an anvil of a man who farms beans and corn and handles cattle with hands that could crush river rocks. His buddy John Helling is too focused to respond. On the fourth jab, Helling pulls the gig from the water, and turns toward us. A 3-pound sucker droops from the gig tines like a sopping wet mustache.

"That's a good one," Reed says. Helling scrapes the fish against a welded plate bolted to the bow deck for just this purpose. Freed from the tines, the fish drops into a galvanized washtub, and Helling turns back to the river.

After two hours of watching, spearing these fish doesn't look so difficult. I've giggered plenty of frogs, and I can spot the suckers even from the back of the boat. The lights wash a huge 50-foot half-circle of the river like a stadium, and suckers, bass, and catfish dart back and forth in the glare. I'm itching to give it a try, but Reed warned that he doesn't put beginners on deck too early. "They'll stir the fish up and don't kill a thing," he said. "We've got to get fish to eat before the newbies get going."

Which shouldn't be a problem. Helling and his giggering partner Glenn Braun are on fire. They must have 30 fish in the tub when Reed leans over. His hoodie shadows his face, and his voice is as gravelly as a prop grinding sand: "You ready to try, Ed?"



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

For 200 years, sucker giggering has been a beloved tradition in this neck of the Missouri Ozarks. Navigating johnboats rigged with bright lights and wielding heavy custom-made gigs, locals throng to the riverbanks on fall and winter nights. As the giggers chase golden redbone suckers, northern hog suckers, and white suckers through the shallows, shore parties break out over bonfires and deep fryers crackling with fish and potatoes. There's music. There's beer. There's enough Carhartt to carpet the planet.

The sucker-giggering season runs from mid September through January, but the best fish sticking cranks up after autumn's leaves are flushed downstream and cold, dry weather drops the water levels. That's when I arrived at the Meramec River, a spring-fed beauty that flows under limestone bluffs an hour west of St. Louis. The very name of the river harkens to an old Algonquian Indian phrase meaning "river of ugly fishes." The moniker is spot-on.

My plan was to hook up with a crowd of local giggers for a few dark Ozark days, sleeping off a full belly of fried suckers late each morning before hauling the boats to new water each night. I failed to figure in the freak weather that would sweep across Missouri just as I arrived. Our first night was a bust. Temperatures dropped 50 degrees in one day, and freezing rain iced the boat ramps on the Meramec and Bourbeuse Rivers. It was a complete shutout—so Reed, Helling, Braun, and I joined my buddy Justin Leesmann, his dad, Bob, and a few of their friends for the next best thing: We beelined to Reed's farm shed along the Bourbeuse to cook fish, drink beer, and *talk* about sucker giggering.

The sport's history in the Ozarks is murky. There's a complete absence of giggering artifacts or oral histories from Missouri's era of Indian inhabitation, so it's unlikely that it was a Native American tradition. What probably happened was the wave of Scots-Irish settlers of the mid 1800s brought with them a subsistence-living culture that turned Ozark rivers on fire at night. Back then, pioneers poled 30-foot wooden longboats and lit the water with blazing knots of sap-rich pine. They called it fire fishing, and the decades that followed brought sucker gigs crafted from old truck springs and shorter gigs that were actually shot from handmade bows.





In Reed's barn, no one recalls anyone gigging with a pine torch. "But I do remember my grandpa out with lanterns on the boats," Helling says. The men would wedge a sheet of tin behind the lantern to reflect the light onto the water. That was the first step up from a jack-pine torch, but hardly the last. On his 18-foot johnboat, Reed runs a 1,000-watt mercury vapor lamp as a center light, framed with two 1,500-watt quartz lights. Powered by a 6,500-watt generator that rumbles amidships, the system could punch light through a half mile of fog. While some giggers are turning to LED lights that run off car batteries, Reed isn't convinced. "Them lights I run," he says, "the white light and blue light blend, and it cuts the water like nothing else."

The only other specialized equipment required is the gig. In the past, gig heads were hand-forged of iron, with one to four brawny spikes that had to be tough enough to bounce off rocks. Reed's are made from steel cut with a water jet, then tempered for strength. The heads are as wide as a man's outstretched fingers, with four barbed prongs. A good sucker gig might run you \$120, not counting an \$80 fiberglass pole.

Killing time we'd hoped would be spent on the river, we play rounds of Ship, Captain, and Crew, making dollar bets on the fall of the dice, and feast on fried crappie and catfish, fried potatoes, and fried venison tenderloin. I figure it's a good time to question the culinary merits of Missouri's most famous trash fish. I've read soaring rhapsodies about a hunk of fried sucker. The fish are scored deeply to let the hot oil get at its many bones, "dissolving" them, as I've heard, so you never know they are there. I wave around a chunk of fried blue cat, and ask: "Compared to this, just how good is a sucker?"

Justin Leesmann bites first: He'd put sucker over any fish but salmon and walleye. Nate Hagedorn is unequivocal. "I'd throw a trout out the window for a fried sucker." No one disagrees.

It's Reed—widely considered the best gigger of the bunch—who throws down the gauntlet. He's holding a piece of fried crappie and looks at it solemnly, as if

considering a communion wafer. "I'd rather eat a white sucker," he says, "out of cold water, scored right, and fried right, than a crappie." This stuns the crowd. The crappie's stature on the plate is fairly unrivaled across much of America. There are murmurs of dissent.

"I don't know," Bob Leesmann says, weighing in from the top of a 5-gallon bucket. "You're pushing it there."

Reed doesn't back down. "Out of cold water," he says again, slowly. "Scored right, to get at them bones." I look around the shed. Nobody argues. In the middle of Missouri, in the middle of an ice storm, these are not inconsequential matters. I'll get my chance to vote soon enough.

#### MOVING TARGETS

I step up to the bow deck with Reed speaking into my ear. I can barely hear him over the outboard motor and the generator. "When the water gets cold they school up and run in

packs," he says. "So you gotta bust 'em up."

Leaning over the homemade bow rail, I struggle to get the gig into position. The gig is unwieldy—it must weigh 15 pounds—and the fish are deeper and quicker than I imagined. Few of them hunker down on the bottom. They're on the run, the boat chasing them like a beagle on a rabbit. There's a grace period during which fish move off from the boat, startled by the light but not yet panicked—but that period doesn't last long. Each time I home in on a sucker, it takes me a few seconds too long to muscle the gig over, and the fish darts away. I try turning the tines parallel with the boat to lessen the drag, and that helps some, but not enough. I jab at a dozen suckers and come close only a couple of times. Now I get what Reed meant about the newbies waiting their turn.

Reed and I have been at it for an hour when he points his gig toward a dark splotch on the bottom. "There's a hog molly," he says. "See him?" Hog mollies are northern hog suckers, built a bit flatter than the rest of the bottom feeders with mottled spots for camouflage, and they tend to hold tighter to the bottom. Easy

CONTINUED ON P. 91

**NIGHT LIFE CLOCKWISE  
FROM ABOVE LEFT: A  
TEAM OF HUNGRY GIG-  
GERS CLEANS A HAUL OF  
SUCKERS; SPEARMEN  
ON THE BOW; BRAD  
REED'S UNCLE RUSS; A  
PAIR OF GIGS DULLED  
BY RIVER ROCKS; A  
STABBED SUCKER.**







WITH THE RIGHT LAND AND HARD WORK, YOU CAN CREATE A HAVEN WHERE DUCKS AND GEESE FEED, REST, AND ROOST—AND WHERE THE HUNTING IS OFF THE CHARTS. THESE THREE EXPERTS HAVE IT DOWN TO A SCIENCE

By Will Brantley

Photo illustration by ERIC HEINTZ



## THE FLOODED FIELD

- **Expert:** Tony Vandemore, co-owner and manager of Habitat Flats; manages 2,800 acres of scattered properties
- **Location:** Missouri's Golden Triangle

### ✕ HIS SECRET

When most hunters hear “duck field,” they think flooded corn, but Vandemore relies heavily on moist-soil vegetation like smartweed and wild millet—stuff that’s naturally in the seedbed. “It has a lot of advantages,” he says. “It’s cheaper to grow, it holds its nutritional value longer than grain once it’s flooded, and early in the season, it’s full of invertebrates, which are a huge part of a duck’s diet.”

It’s also easy to establish. “You can take a farmer’s field that’s been sprayed and cultivated for 50 years, leave it alone for one year, and it’ll grow up fast in natural vegetation,” he says. “The good stuff is probably already in the ground, waiting to grow.”

### HIS METHOD

Growing moist-soil vegetation is a simple matter of manipulating the water on a flooded field at the right time and then leaving it alone. To regulate floodwater, Vandemore uses pumps and six-board water-control structures, in which boards set into a levee can be removed to change the level.

Starting around June 1 through mid July, he begins lowering the water on flooded fields by removing one board at a time. Vegetation grows quickly in the exposed areas and eventually covers the entire field once it’s drained.

When the greenery is thick and lush, he mows it (another advantage of natural stuff, since you can’t legally manipulate planted crops for waterfowl), puts the boards back into place, and then pumps in about 10 inches of water. “Flood the field when the average air temperature is above 55 degrees and you’ll get a lot more bugs,” he says. To start a new field or rejuvenate an old one, Vandemore plows or disks to disturb the seed bank, waits for natural vegetation to cover the area, mows, and then just adds water.



**Big Green**  
A drake mallard looks for the perfect spot to touch down.

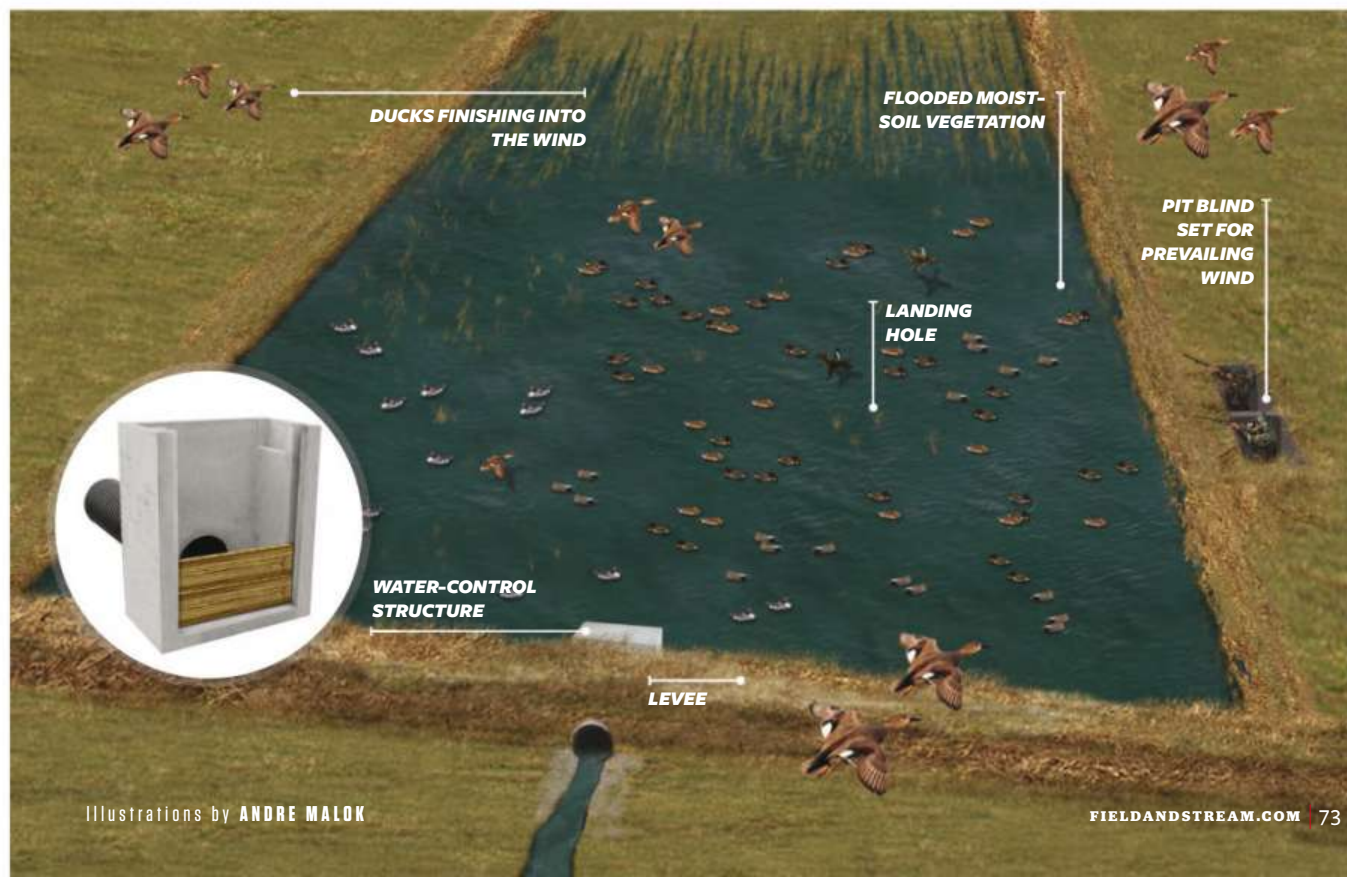
### VANDEMORE'S HUNT TIPS

- ✕ **“PICK YOUR DECOY SPREAD UP AFTER EVERY HUNT OR YOU’LL RUIN A GOOD FIELD.”**
- ✕ **“IF IT’S COLDER THAN 20 DEGREES, DON’T HUNT UNTIL MIDMORNING. OTHERWISE, YOU’LL BLOW DUCKS OFF THE FIELD IN THE DARK, IT WILL FREEZE, AND THEY WON’T COME BACK.”**

### HIS RESULTS

Vandemore’s fields see a steady swarm of ducks, starting with blue-wings in August, soon followed by pintails, gadwalls, wigeon, and mallards. Ducks keep using the fields until they freeze.

“We shoot plenty of birds over moist-soil vegetation through November,” Vandemore says. “I’ve always believed that if you can hold those early ducks as they’re on the way down, you’ll hold the birds behind them, too.”



Illustrations by **ANDRE MALOK**



## THE PERFECT PONDS

- **Expert:** Scott Jasion, small-business owner; manages 85 contiguous acres
- **Location:** Maryland's Eastern Shore

### **X HIS SECRET**

Jasion, an F&S Hero of Conservation, banks on resting ponds. On Maryland's Eastern Shore, most hunting properties are 100 acres or less, and most duck holes are created by flooding a stand of corn. "Over the years, I've noticed ducks often feed in flooded corn all night, then leave to rest somewhere else during the day," he says. "I have two ponds on my place—one is an acre and the other is 2 acres. I converted the larger one from a feeding area full of flooded corn to an open-water resting area.

### JASION'S HUNT TIPS

✱ **"TO MANAGE PRESSURE, NEVER JUMP-SHOOT A REST POND. WALK THE BIRDS UP, AND THEN HUNT THE SINGLES AND SMALL GROUPS AS THEY RETURN."**

✱ **"A-FRAME BLINDS ARE EASIER TO SHOOT OUT OF, AND THEY ALLOW YOU TO WATCH THE BIRDS WORK. PEOPLE THINK THEY SPOOK BIRDS, BUT THEY DON'T."**

When I did that, we started shooting a lot more birds."

Jasion also maintains a dry, 30-acre cropfield planted in either corn or soybeans, where he typically sets up to goose hunt. The resting pond helps keep the geese on his ground as much as it does the ducks.

### HIS METHOD

"Clear water is the key," Jasion says. Just any old farm pond won't do.

"The shallow point of my pond is 6 inches deep, and the deep end is 3 feet. I leave it full of water year-round, but I run Ice Eaters all summer to keep the water moving and clear of algae. I also treat it periodically with algicide. Every couple of years, I drain the pond so the moist-soil vegetation grows back up, and also to keep the bottom from becoming too silted in."

Jasion still drains his smaller pond and plants corn or sorghum around the edges—and it still holds ducks—but the larger body of open water



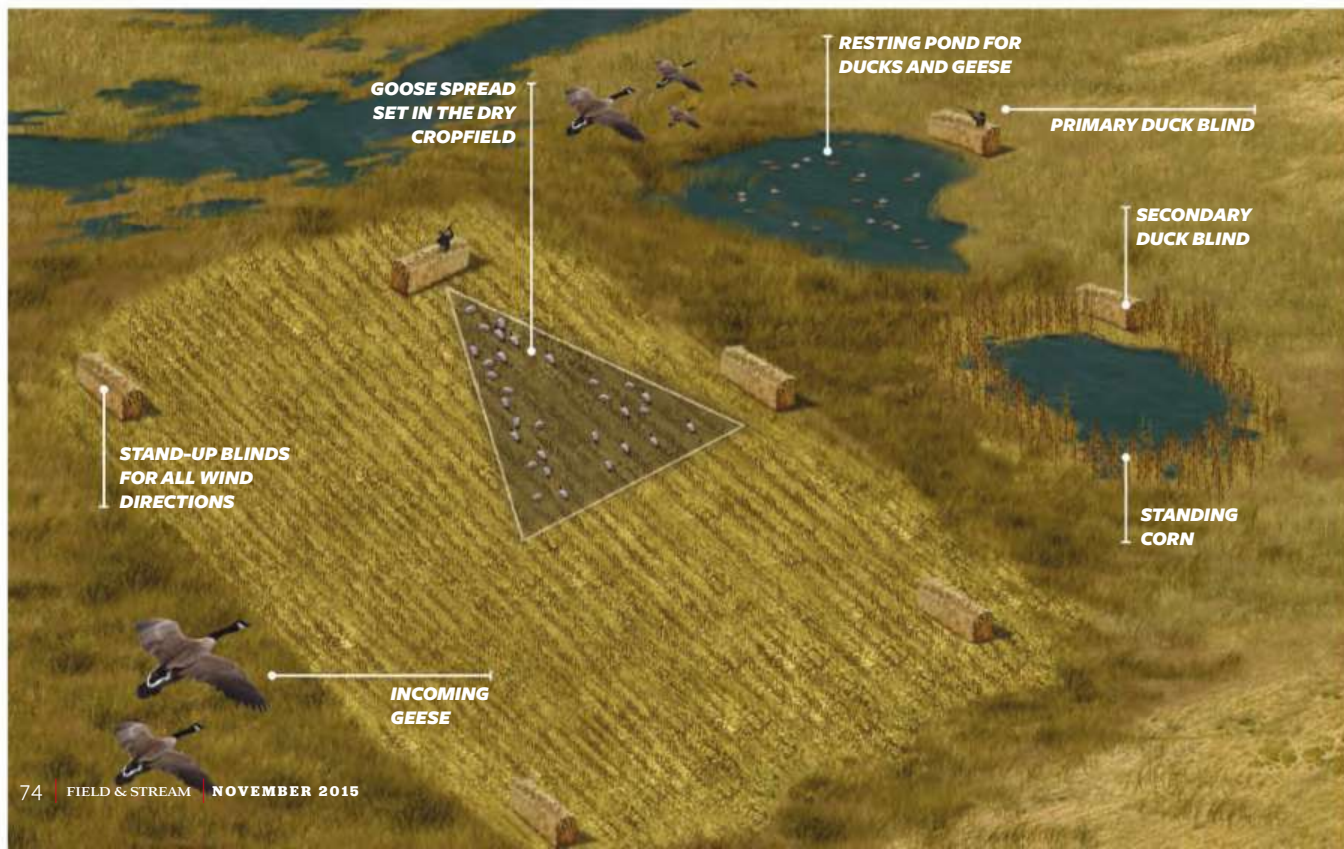
is the key attractant with so much flooded corn already in the area.

### HIS RESULTS

"We shoot ducks over the pond all

season long, and it holds ducks all the way through the following July," Jasion says. "We get a lot of wood ducks nesting around it, and we hunt them once the early season comes in." He also gets mallards, black ducks, and wigeon through January. Most of his goose hunting is done in the field, where he and his hunting partners can usually get their limits. "But we've had some excellent goose hunts on the pond, too," Jasion says. "We'll kick up 300 to 400 geese from it before daylight on any given morning."

**Corn Club**  
A duck hunter adjusts his spread in a flooded cornfield.







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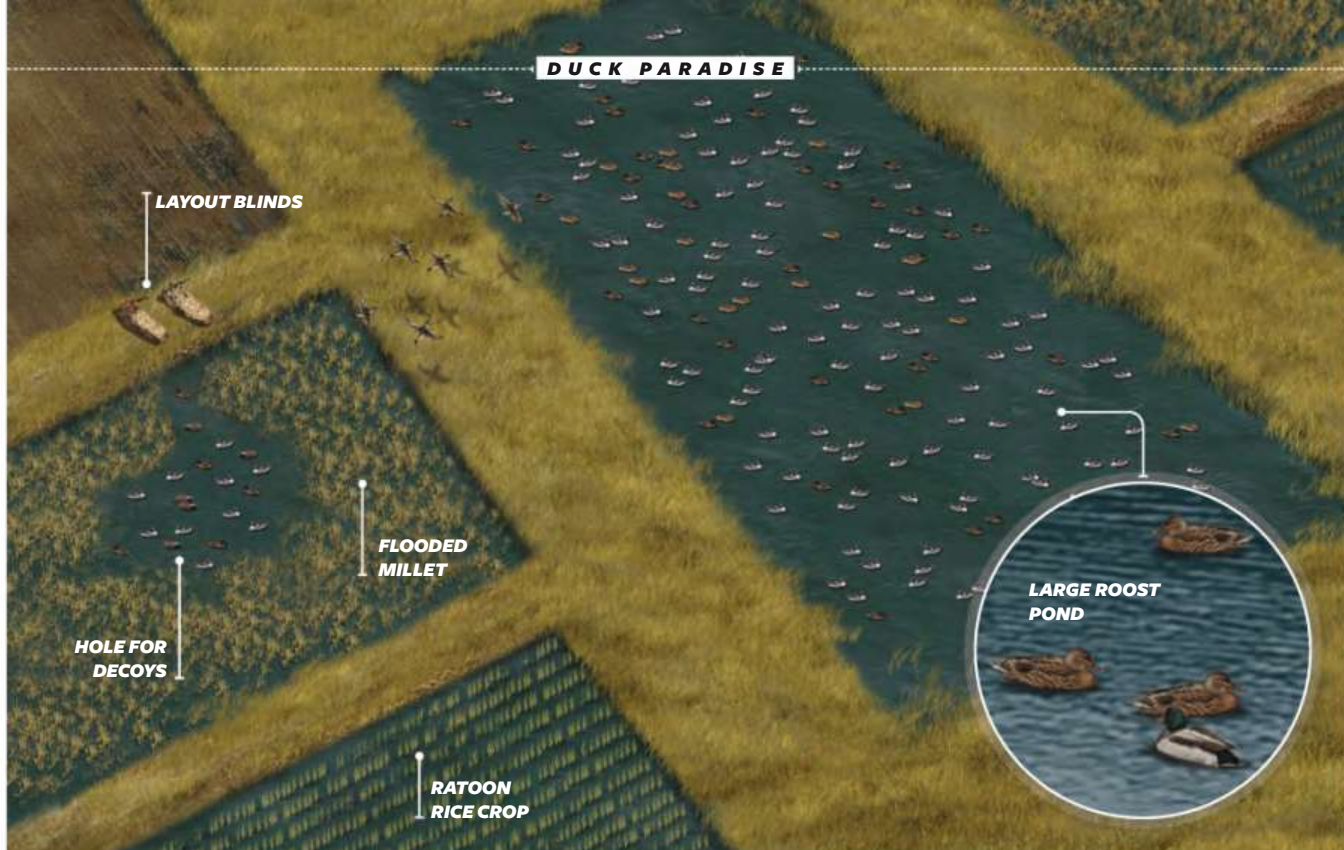


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## THE FOWL FEEDLOT

- **Expert:** Tim Soderquist, senior regional director, Ducks Unlimited; manages 2,200 contiguous acres
- **Location:** Coastal Texas

### ✖ HIS SECRET

For Soderquist, it's all about providing a season-long buffet. In a major wintering area like the Texas Gulf Coast, ducks frequently pile into favored spots and stay put. He and his buddies make their lease into one of those hangouts by surrounding a large roost pond—a 90-acre flooded field—with smaller satellite ponds that are full of duck food. “We try to set up our habitat so that there are different foods maturing throughout the season,” he says.

The lease is a working rice farm; two yields are the norm in South Texas. The first crop is cut in late July

or August. The second—called the ratoon crop—is usually cut in October. Because flooding is a part of the rice-agriculture process, the fields are magnets to ducks.

But Soderquist doesn't stop there. He manages other ponds for moist-soil vegetation and plants still more crops like Japanese millet. “Many hunters are intimidated at

the thought of planting and flooding crops for ducks because of federal baiting laws,” Soderquist says. “But if you simply adhere to the language, which isn't complicated, there's nothing to worry about.”

### HIS METHOD

For fields to be planted, Soderquist starts plowing in late June and begins planting by the Fourth of July. As he broadcasts the seed and rolls it in, he leaves an open hole for decoys directly in front of the typical blind locations.

Ideally, the millet is 14 to 16 inches tall with a good seed head by the September teal season. And just as that

hunt begins, the landowner begins flooding the ratoon rice crop. “Timing is everything,” Soderquist says. “When the farmer floods his second crop, we get our duck water, and a new food source.”

### HIS RESULTS

The roost pond frequently holds thousands of ducks, but Soderquist and his buddies never hunt it. “Our satellite ponds wouldn't be nearly so good if we shot them out of the roost,” he says. Instead, some of those ducks will invariably trickle out to the smaller feeding areas, where Soderquist and his buddies are waiting. **FS**

RICK ADAIR (HUNTER); DONALD M. JONES (PINTAIL)

### SODERQUIST'S HUNT TIPS

- ✖ “WE USE STAND-UP BLINDS ON SKIDS AND LAYOUT BLINDS TO MOVE TO WHERE THE DUCKS WANT TO BE.”
- ✖ “TEXAS-RIGGED DECOYS LET YOU SET UP AND PICK UP FAST. THE SOONER YOU CAN GET OUT OF A FIELD AND LET THE DUCKS HAVE IT, THE BETTER.”



**Take Him**  
A bull pintail backpedals; a hunter sets decoys in a flooded millet field (left).



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**BY TOM DAVIS**

Butch, in his prime, after a pheasant hunt in northwest Iowa in the mid 2000s.



**THE PAINFUL LOSS OF A GOOD BIRD DOG  
LEADS TO HEALING, AND HAPPINESS, IN A VERY  
UNEXPECTED WAY. AN UPLAND LOVE STORY**

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATHAN KIRKMAN**





**WAS A JOURNEYMAN**, a blue-collar, lunch-bucket kind of bird dog. He didn't have great talent, but he was as reliable as they come. He always gave you an honest day's work. He always gave it everything he had.

And now he was dying.

I'd spread blankets on the kitchen floor, next to the food he'd stopped eating and the water he'd stopped drinking, so I could lie next to him in the night. To be able to reach out with a comforting hand was all I could think of to do; my only palliative for his terrible pain. Butch was already taking twice the dose of Tramadol he'd originally been prescribed, and even that was barely enough to keep him from crying out whenever he tried to move.

The cancer had eaten away at the base of his spine. One day I'd noticed that Butch seemed to be holding his tail, a classic English setter plume, at an oddly canted angle. A day later he began to favor his hindquarters, and when I probed along his back and hips, searching for some clue to what was vexing him, he whimpered softly at my touch.

"Hey, Butchy-boy," I said, cupping his handsome head in my hands and gazing into his dark eyes. "It'll be O.K."

But I was wrong. There wasn't a thing that anyone could do. The disease, far advanced, took Butch down with appalling swiftness. In less than two weeks this strappingly athletic gun dog, by all appearances robustly healthy, became a wasted husk who had to be carried outside to relieve himself. When he looked at me in pleading incomprehension, unable to understand what was happening to him and why I wasn't making it better, the sense of helplessness overwhelmed me. I felt bludgeoned.

It wasn't a hard decision; it was the only decision. His suffering needed to stop. The arrangements for the following morning had been made. And so I found myself on the kitchen floor next to my trembling dog, trying to calm his ragged breathing and keep the terror at bay. When my wife saw us lying side by side, she burst into tears.

**BETWEEN BUTCH AND** his kennelmate, Ernie, I'd figured I was good to go for several more years. I've always kept at least two dogs—for a bird hunter's usual practical reasons, sure, but also because having two dogs, with their different personalities and skill sets, just makes me happy. You might even say it makes me feel rich.

Now, with Butch's sudden loss, I had a hole to fill and nothing in the pipeline. But I have friends who are well connected in the world of pointers and setters, and they know what I like in a dog. In particular, they know how much

value I place on that indefinable quality called *class*. As someone once quipped, you can teach a pig to point, but this sport isn't simply about walking in front of a stationary animal and kicking up a bird. It's about being swept off your feet by the transcendent artistry of a fine dog making game. It's about becoming engaged, body and soul, in a drama that's as old as the partnership between men and dogs—and as new as the moment that's about to unfold.

I put out the word that I was in the market for an English setter pup. And I struck gold.

I didn't know it at the time, of course. All I knew was that a friend in Minne-

**“What emerged from that soapy water was the prettiest orange-speckled setter puppy you’ve ever seen. And the most vivacious.”**

sota owned the rights to an uncommonly well-bred female setter puppy from a litter in Maryland, and he was willing to transfer those rights to me.

"What's the catch?" I asked when I got my friend on the phone.

"No catch," he said. "I'm just full up with dogs right now. I'll tell you this, though. You'd be crazy not to take this pup. This breeding's producing some of the nicest setters I've seen. And you know me—I'm a pointer man."

Actually, there *was* a catch: The price was more than double what I'd ever paid for a puppy. On top of the small fortune we'd spent on Butch's veterinary bills—including two MRIs and multiple con-

sults with specialists—I wasn't sure we could swing it. And I wasn't sure I could make a compelling argument to my wife that, out of the universe of available English setter puppies, this was the one I needed to have.

"You really want this puppy?" Joan asked after I'd laid my cards on the table.

"Yeah, I do," I replied.

"Oh, hell," she said. "I guess a few hundred bucks isn't going to kill us."

There still was the matter of getting the puppy from Maryland to Wisconsin, since the days of affordable air transportation for dogs have gone the way of eight-track tape players. We finally found a field trialer willing to give her a ride as far as his home in Michigan. I'd drive there and pick her up.

My first impression of Tina, as we'd decided to call her, was that she stunk. She'd apparently spent the previous 24 to 48 hours—the guy was vague about that—in a box in the back of his pickup, with no place to do her business except the straw she was bedded in. Reminding myself that field trialers are just *different*, I thanked him, bundled my poop-smearing puppy into her crate, and headed for home. When I cleared the Chicago traffic and could give Joan a reasonable approximation of our ETA, I called to ask her to have a bucket of soapy water waiting for us.

Have you heard the expression "as pretty as a speckled pup"? Well, what emerged from that soapy water was the prettiest orange-speckled setter puppy you've ever seen. And the most vivacious. Her flashing eyes seemed to say, *Where's the pool, and what's the record?*

I fell instantly and irrevocably in love.

**THAT WAS SEVEN** years ago. Since then, Tina has hunted 11 species of gamebirds in 10 different states in countless permutations of cover, terrain, and weather—and she's confirmed the accuracy of my first impression in every way. The substance of her body of work is remarkable, but it's her style that sets her apart. When Tina runs, it's as if she's throwing sparks, her skimming strides barely touching the ground, her





The author and Tina share a moment of mutual affection.

I pondered the question of Tina's registered name for quite a while. But when it finally came to me, it was so obvious, and so perfect, I wondered why it had taken me so long. SWEET-HEART OF THE PINES, her papers read.

Like all dogs, Tina has her faults. She has the common setter shortcoming of needing a lot of water in warm conditions (although when there's snow on the ground, she'll hunt all day without drawing a deep breath), and while she'll honor another dog's point, her heart's clearly not in it. She won't steal point—she'd never do that—but if she's sailing past and figures she can con me into believing she doesn't see the other dog, she's apt to keep right on going (unless I holler *Whoa!*). In Tina's view, her time would be better spent stepping out in search of another bird.

She also applies a discriminating logic to the task of retrieving. Basically, the greater the danger that a downed bird might go unrecovered, the more effort Tina invests in retrieving it. The paradigm in this respect was the time a hunting partner wing-tipped a grouse that fell in an alder swamp and proceeded to flutter-hop deeper and deeper into the quagmire. Three setters splashed in after it, but within a few minutes two of them, soaked to the skin, came dragging back. Only Tina pressed on, the tinkle of her bell, like our hopes for recovering the grouse, growing fainter by the second.

We shouldn't have doubted. It took Tina a good 10 minutes, maybe longer, but ultimately she brought the bird (minus some tail feathers) back.

My hunting partner acted like he'd just seen the ghosts of Jack Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe doing the tango. "That's the damndest retrieve I've ever seen," he said.

**THE THUMP OF A TAIL** on the floor, the press of a cold nose against your hand, the simple exchange of eye contact: These and a hundred other gestures serve to remind us, every day, of the ancient bond of trust that unites dogs and men. Still, the painful biological reality is that our dogs' life spans are significantly shorter than ours. This forces us to commodify them, to regard them at some level as *things* that will, after a finite period of service, need to be replaced. As uncomfortable as it is to think about it in these terms, it's the Faustian bargain a bird hunter implicitly agrees to when he brings home that first puppy and proclaims himself a Dog Man.

And, as Dog Men, there comes a time when we realize that the chapters of our personal history are largely the stories of the dogs we shared those years with. Our dogs become the frames, and the measures, of our narrative. The spoonfuls of their lives fill the cups of ours.

Butch died. He died before he should have, and he died after suffering terrible pain. That part of it haunts me, still. But if Butch hadn't died at that particular moment in time, I wouldn't have gotten Tina. And I shudder to imagine what I would have missed.

Butch always gave me everything he had. In Tina, he gave me his greatest gift of all.

FS

tail swishing like the blade of a cane-cutter. On point, her resoluteness is breathtaking, and she reacts so instantaneously to scent that she sometimes strikes poses that leave me shaking my head, thinking *How in the world?*

Once, running a field edge at full speed, she pinwheeled 90 degrees to her left—it was as if an invisible chain had hooked her collar—and landed on point with her front end crouched so low and her back end jacked so high that something seemed off. When I got within a few yards of her I saw what it was: Her front paws were folded underneath her. She was literally standing on her wrists.

This is a dog that would turn herself inside out to keep from bumping a bird. I've seen rooster pheasants parade so brassily in front of Tina that they should be flagged for taunting, and she doesn't even twitch.

Tina's petite stature—she weighs 35 pounds soaking wet—and ebullient personality only add to her allure. She might have been born to hunt birds, but she's up for whatever the day may bring. When she sees me coming with her lead in my hands (meaning that a walk is in the offing), she yips, leaps, and spins circles in midair, her exuberance on extravagant display.



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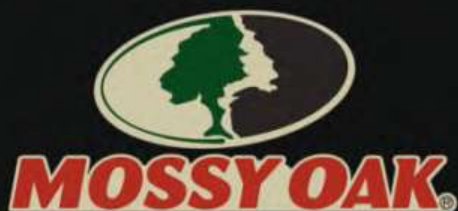


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## GAME SMOKERS

Our team spent a year testing four entry-level in-line muzzle-loaders to see which delivers the best combination of performance and value

By Slaton L. White

# FIELD TEST

GEAR  
REVIEWS  
YOU CAN  
TRUST



*Pole Position* •  
Testers gave the  
CVA Optima V2  
(far left) top  
honors.





A diehard contingent of traditionalists still dress in skins and tote period smokepoles, but the vast majority of today's muzzleloader hunters use modern in-lines, for three reasons: These guns go bang pretty much every time; they are comparatively easy to maintain; and you can buy a decent one for just a few hundred bucks. The only question is, which should you choose? For this yearlong test, we asked four experienced blackpowder hunters to use the four entry-level in-lines at right to see which delivered the best accuracy, reliability, and value. And given the foul nature of muzzle-loading propellants, ease of cleaning was a top issue, too.

## TEST PANEL

## DEL AKINS, 63

Home Hunting Area: Kansas  
Days Hunted per Year: 15

## ED BUETI, 50

Home Hunting Area: New York  
Days Hunted per Year: 40

## JEFF LUNDGREN, 32

Home Hunting Area: Minnesota  
Days Hunted per Year: 25

## JAMES PETERSON, 43

Home Hunting Area: Utah  
Days Hunted per Year: 10



[1] CVA OPTIMA V2

\$300 AND UP;  
CVA.COM

★★★★★

**THE LOWDOWN** The Optima earned the highest rating with its excellent performance and value. "It's a beautiful gun all around," said Peterson. "Easy to load, and the trigger was light and crisp—no creep."

"The break-open mechanism is smooth, the breech plug is easy to extract by hand, and it's a shooter," said Lundgren. "I can't find a single element of this gun that I dislike."

Bueti and Akins agreed; the latter asked, "What more could you want for only \$300, with a scope?"

**HITS** "Impressive accuracy." —Lundgren

**MISSSES** "Could use a better recoil pad." —Bueti



[2] TRADITIONS PURSUIT 64 ULTRALIGHT

\$329 AND UP;  
TRADITIONSFIREARMS.COM

★★★★★

**THE LOWDOWN** Testers compared the Ultralight favorably with the Optima in terms of features, function, and value (it, too, includes a scope). "Great construction," said Peterson. "Hammer safety plus crossbolt safety is doubly nice."

Bueti called the ignition system "the best I've used. It's very easy to access for cleaning." He also said the Ultralight's accuracy rivaled that of a centerfire rifle.

Lundgren praised the lightweight design, while Akins felt some users might find the recoil a bit much.

**HITS** "Best breech plug." —Akins

**MISSSES** "Plastic trigger guard." —Bueti



[3] THOMPSON/CENTER IMPACT

\$263 AND UP;  
TCARMS.COM

★★★★★

**THE LOWDOWN** While the Impact was accurate, the testers agreed that the break-open mechanism was hard to operate, and the small hammer was difficult to engage.

"The rifle is light and well balanced," said Bueti. "The excellent trigger helped me get 2-inch groups at 100 yards." Lundgren shot it well, too, but found it difficult to clean, largely because the breech plug requires a tool to remove.

Peterson said the recoil pad was the best of the bunch.

**HITS** "Shoulders and points well." —Peterson

**MISSSES** "Breech plug got stuck." —Bueti



[4] KNIGHT VISION

\$340 AND UP;  
KNIGHTRIFLES.COM

★★★★★

**THE LOWDOWN** Votes were split on the Vision. Peterson appreciated the "clean, simple, and durable design," and he liked the crossbolt safety.

To Lundgren, the rifle "felt very solid in my hands, like it will stand up to the test of time."

Akins, however, said the trigger "was only average because of creep," which affected accuracy. Bueti said the rifle was easy to load, but the "breech access could be better. I had trouble extracting the primer after a shot."

**HITS** "Very durable." —Lundgren

**MISSSES** "Not as much value here." —Akins





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## BARGAIN SHOPPER

## TREESTANDS FOR UNDER \$100

The price of high-end hang-ons has soared through the canopy, but you can still get a good model for less **By Dave Hurteau**



Have you noticed that virtually all the top-shelf hang-on tree-stands cost north of \$200 these days? That's crazy. Totally nuts. I don't know anyone who spends that kind of money on a lock-on. Do you?

I do know, on the other hand, that you

can get a perfectly good general-purpose model for less than half that. It'll be constructed of steel (not aluminum), so it'll be a little heavier. And it will probably have fewer bells and whistles. But it'll do the job without mugging you. Here are four great examples.



**FIELD & STREAM TIMBERLINE**  
\$79.99;  
DICKSSPORTINGGOODS.COM  
OUTLET PRICE: SAME

**BARGAIN RATING** Excellent • Ease of Use: Very good • Features: Excellent • Comfort: Very good • Stealth: Very good

**SPECS** Steel construction; nylon cinch strap • 19.8 lb. • 29<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 24" platform with footrest • 19" x 12" fabric seat • 300-lb. capacity

**COMMENTS** Before anyone cries foul, F&S the magazine is in no way affiliated with this maker. The Timberline just happens to be a solidly made, comfortable, roomy stand at a killer price. What really puts it over the top are the excellent platform- and seat-leveling systems, which no other stand here has. It doesn't bite into the tree that great, so bring an extra ratchet strap to crank it down tight.

**MUDDY THE BOSS XL**  
\$129.99; GOMUDDY.COM  
OUTLET PRICE: \$99.99  
(SPORTSMANSGUIDE.COM)

**BARGAIN RATING** Excellent • Ease of Use: Very good • Features: Very good • Comfort: Very good • Stealth: Excellent

**SPECS** Steel construction; nylon cinch strap • 20 lb. • 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 25" platform with footrest • 18" x 12" cushion seat • 300-lb. capacity

**COMMENTS** The Boss XL's strap attaches to the stand via two loops in the nylon webbing, letting you instantly undo either end to switch the buckle to whichever side makes hanging easier—a handy feature. With no metal hook, the strap is quieter, too. The XL goes up solidly and the metal has a great, no-slip finish. Like the platform, the seat is big, but the foam is a little cheap and squishy.

**X-STAND THE CHAMP**  
\$119.99; X-STAND.COM  
OUTLET PRICE: \$99.99  
(SPORTSMANSGUIDE.COM)

**BARGAIN RATING** Very good • Ease of Use: Very good • Features: Good • Comfort: Very good • Stealth: Very good

**SPECS** Steel construction; nylon cinch strap • 20 lb. • 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 25" platform with footrest • 18" x 12" cushion seat • 300-lb. capacity

**COMMENTS** No single feature of the Champ jumps up and grabs you. It's a sturdy, roomy stand that goes up fairly quickly and quietly, bites firmly into the tree, and has a good-size, comfortable seat. The company lists the platform at 34 inches deep, but that includes the upswept footrest portion, which you can't really stand on. Bottom line: It's a basic but well-made steel hang-on for a very reasonable price.

**MILLENNIUM M25A**  
\$99.95;  
MILLENNIUMSTANDS.COM  
OUTLET PRICE: SAME

**BARGAIN RATING** Good • Ease of Use: Good • Features: Very good • Comfort: Excellent • Stealth: Poor

**SPECS** Steel construction; chain attachment with secondary ratchet strap • 19 lb. • 29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 24" platform with footrest • 20" x 16" fabric seat • 300-lb. capacity

**COMMENTS** This is a really well-made stand—built to last with probably the best seat in the business. I just can't get past the chain attachment. A chain is always making unwanted noise, and you can never get it quite as tight as a good strap. That said, if noise isn't a big factor for you—say, if you'll hang the stand well ahead of the hunt and leave it for a while—the M25A will serve you very well.



## THE TEST

After assembling the stands, I weighed them with my scale and measured dimensions with my tape. Then I hit the woods to test for the following:

• **Ease of Use** With a timer running, I hung each stand—twice—to see how quickly and easily I could attach it securely and be ready to hunt.

• **Comfort** I sat in each stand for several hours to gauge how comfortably a hunter could spend the good part of a day in it.

• **Stealth** I toted each model through the woods to see how easily and quietly it carried. I also paid attention to noise while hanging the stand, and then torqued the metal to check for creaks.

• **Features** I gave extra credit for any unexpected or especially good features (such as the Millennium seat) in this price range. —D.H.





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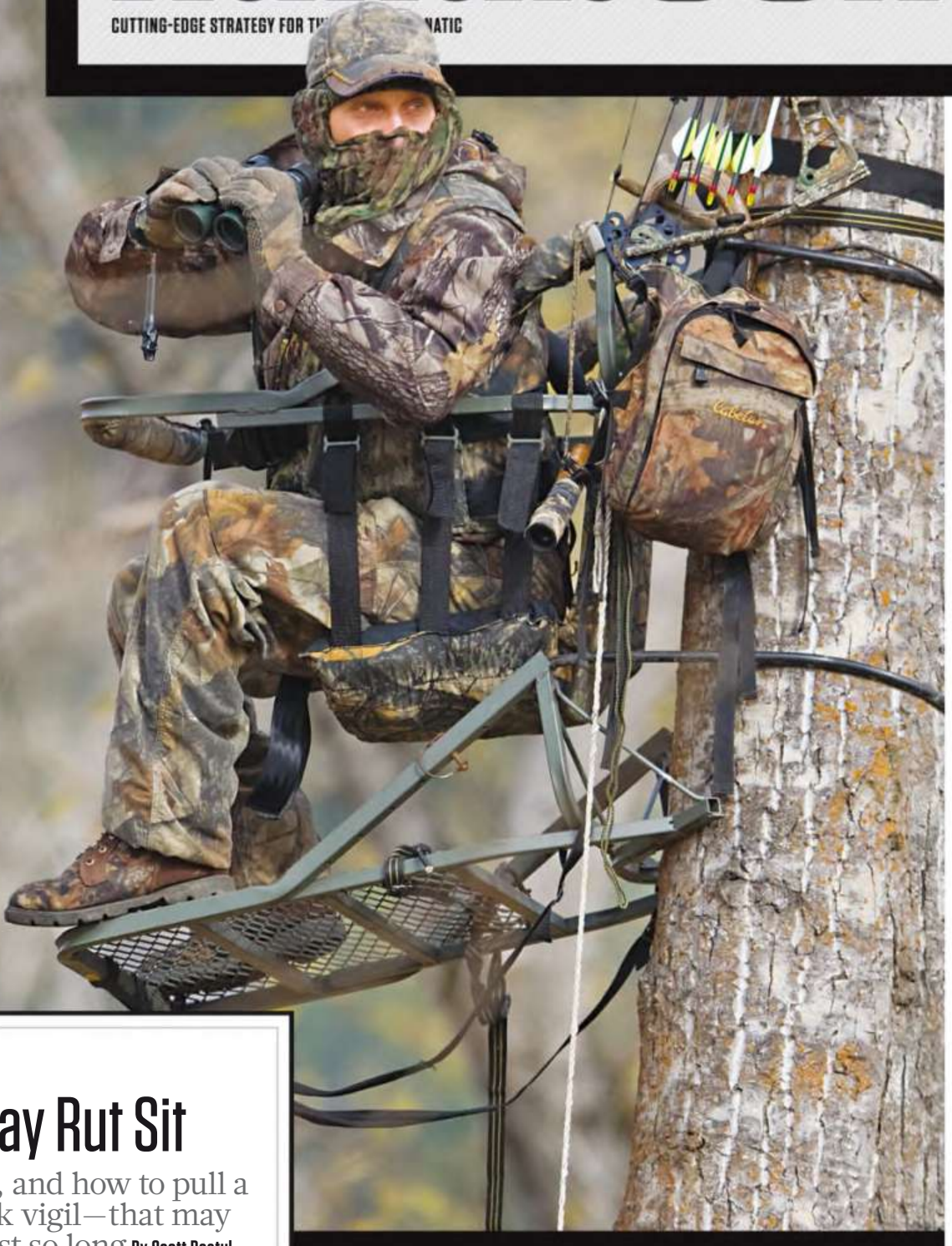


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BONUS  
SECTION*Day Tripper*

Proper clothing, food, and mind-set are essential for long vigils.

# \* WHITETAIL \* Handbook

CUTTING-EDGE STRATEGY FOR THE HUNTER



## The All-Day Rut Sit

When, where, and how to pull a dawn-to-dusk vigil—that may not need to last so long **By Scott Bestul**





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It's a simple equation: The more rutting bucks move, the less successful hunters do—as in, not at all. For much of the year, whitetails are generally crepuscular creatures. But when breeding activity ramps up, a buck is as likely to be on his feet at noon—or 10 A.M., or 2 P.M.—as he is at dawn and dusk. The only way to tag such a buck is to be waiting when he puts his track shoes on. But when is that, exactly? Where should you locate yourself? And are you truly prepared to put in the hours? Follow the guidelines below to sit your way to a rut wall-hanger.



*Preoccupied*  
A big 8-point tailing  
an estrous doe.

## 1 ANALYZE BREEDING ACTIVITY

Sure, lots of rubs and scrapes are exciting, but an explosion of buck sign is just a preamble to the Big Show. Wait for bucks to get truly amped up. They should be seriously harassing does at feeding areas, and if you spot an all-out chase, peak breeding is a handful of days off. Once bucks reach this fever pitch, gear up for an all-day hunt.

## 2 CHOOSE THE SPOT

There are two prime locations for an all-day stand hunt: doe bedding areas, and terrain funnels that connect bedding cover and feeding areas. If you know the specific places where does bed, wriggle into them at first light because bucks will be nosing around them throughout the day. If you're uncertain, focus on terrain funnels that connect thick cover and popular feeding areas such as farm fields, food plots, clear-cuts, and oak ridges.

Bucks will prowls these areas constantly, seeking out estrous does.

## 3 WATCH THE WEATHER


The whitetail rut occurs at about the same time every year, but daytime rutting activity is influenced by temperature. If heat and relative humidity are high, whitetails will limit movement to the dead of night. Drop plans for a midday hunt and focus on the normal dawn and dusk activity windows. But if there's a cold snap—especially one accompanied by snow—count on bucks to travel throughout the day.

## 4 GEAR YOURSELF UP

You've got to prepare for cold dawn temps and the warmth of midday; wear light clothing if you've got a long walk to your stand, and carry extra layers in a daypack. Don't skimp on food and water. You'll function better with plenty of liquids (sports drinks, soups,

juices) and solid food (high-carb items like trail mix, peanut-butter sandwiches, and dried fruit). Don't neglect entertainment, either. A good paperback will keep you occupied through deerless spells, and don't feel bad about texting your buddies or enjoying a game on a smartphone if it'll keep you out there.

## 5 TAKE A BREAK

Sticking with a stand can get exhausting and claustrophobic (the five-hour mark is when it kicks in for me), and sometimes you just need a little break to regain your stamina. When that happens, I get down, walk a few circles around the tree, and sit or lie down for a bit to stretch. I've even sat against the base of the tree and taken a short nap. However, I'm haunted by the story of my cousin, who took such a snooze and woke to find a giant buck staring at him from 15 steps. Usually, a minor respite is all I need before climbing back up. 





TACTICS

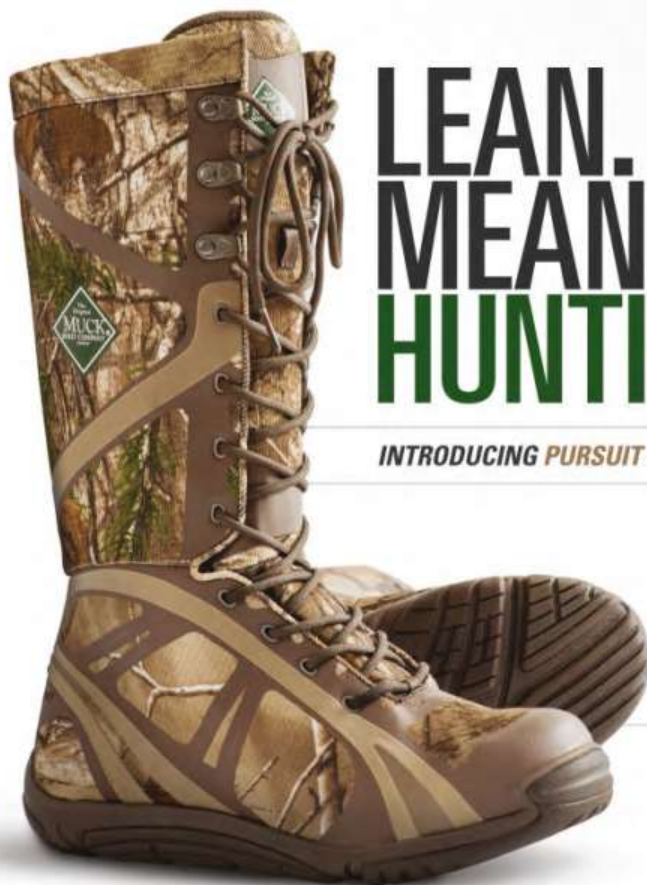
## Jump on Her Bed

Find November bucks by looking where they're looking **By Scott Bestul**

### Field Day

Does will bed in areas of large fields where they feel secure.

**B**ucks are hunting does as hard as we're hunting bucks right now, so it makes sense for us to ambush our trophies where they're most likely to search: places where the females bed. Here are four of the favorite sanctuaries that does are using—and how to set up in them to take a buck.



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1

**RIDGE END**

Does love to bed on ridge ends, even more so when the wind is blowing straight along the ridgetop, directly toward the point. Then, does can bed down at the very tip and look over the edge. The wind warns them of danger approaching from their back, and their eyes can detect any threat approaching from below.

**BEST SETUP**

Place a stand right at the end of the ridge, and sit it only when the wind blows toward the tip. You'll have a virtual no-bust setup that you can sit all day, particularly during the rut, or when hunting pressure forces deer to bed where they feel most secure.

2

**SIDEHILL BENCH**

In hilly or mountainous country, does love to bed on any flat spot on the sidehill, where they enjoy similar advantages to bedding on the ridge end but with added protection from strong winds. During storm fronts, especially, benches on the lee side of a hill are excellent places to look for does.

**BEST SETUP**

Thermals can make any sidehill a tricky spot for a stand, so hang two sets: one above the bench and one below it. Sit in the stand that won't allow thermals to spread your scent to the bench. Still-hunting the sidehill above the bench can be a very effective tactic, especially for a firearm hunt.

3

**HIGH SPOT IN A SWAMP OR MARSH**

Swamps offer thermal cover, protection from high winds and precipitation, and safety from hunters and predators. Does will seek out humps and bumps where they can bed high and dry.

**BEST SETUP**

Hang a stand right in the middle of a swamp's large, dry flat. Does will work down from neighboring high-ground feeding areas and/or move to escape from hunters. If you're hunting a cattail or willow marsh, set up on trail(s) leading to and from the bedding cover. During rifle season, making small pushes through a marsh can be productive.

4

**BIG-FIELD HIDEY-HOLE**

CRP or fallow fields are favorite bedding places for does in farm and prairie country. While all fields appear the same at first glance, does invariably prefer those that offer some sort of structure—a lone tree, a patch of brush, a weed-choked depression, a wooded fenceline—that makes them feel secure.

**BEST SETUP**

Since a treestand is rarely an option, tuck a ground blind against the highest cover, or don a gillie suit and wriggle against weeds or brush to hide your silhouette. Rifle hunters can often glass a field from a high vantage point, then plan a stalk when they see a buck cruising. **FS**

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## STRATEGIES

## The Rut Drive

Not seeing any bucks during the best time of the year to hunt deer? Give them a little bump **By Gerald Almy**

**M**ost hunters save drives for the late season. Deer are holed up in pockets of cover then and aren't moving much—perfect circumstances for organizing a drive to get those bucks out of hiding.

*Stepping Out*  
An Alabama deer hunter pushes the pines.

But the peak breeding period presents a nearly identical situation. Bucks are hunkered in cover, and not moving much, because they have what they want: an estrous doe. Their urge to stay with that doe and breed her can actually make drives during lockdown even more productive than late-season ones.

When those late drives occur, survival is a buck's only goal. But during the rut, he has conflicting urges—breeding and survival—which make him less likely to abandon his mate and slip out some overlooked escape route.

Two kinds of drives work now: a two- or three-hunter “bump,” used when you have pinpointed a breeding pair in an isolated pocket of cover or have encountered them there before; and one that targets large areas of doe habitat that bucks are visiting now.

### DO THE BUMP

Think *small* for these drives. Likely spots include islands of tall weeds in a field, thickets of saplings and deadfalls, brushy cover behind a dam, clusters of cedars in a fallow field, brier patches next to a farm driveway, points of cover jutting into a field, or patches of brambles next to a rut chasing area.

Determine wind direction as well as the nearest thicket where the pair may seek refuge. Place a hunter downwind near that spot. Have one or two hunters sneak toward the pair or the suspected lie, with the wind blowing crossways or toward the deer. Their job: Bump the doe. The buck will follow. Since these are isolated cover patches, the pair will naturally flee to the next thicket.

### MOVE THE FAMILY

For these drives, rely on your scouting knowledge of where different doe family groups hang out in semiopen pockets of pines, shrubs, plum thickets, laurel, raspberry, and honeysuckle near major food sources or stream borders. Bucks weren't here a month ago, but now they're dropping in between breeding sessions to hook up with another estrous doe.

These 2- to 5-acre core doe areas aren't as tightly defined, so you need four to six hunters to drive them. Put standers where the cover peters out, at the starting point, and on any side ditches, fingers of vegetation, or funnels where an estrous doe may bail out from the group and entice a buck to follow. Push slowly with a crossing wind or tailwind.

Most bucks will stay with the estrous doe when she jumps, but be alert. Some older bucks will hunker down because they know where the doe will go and can find her later.

Work the area thoroughly, and pause occasionally so that you'll cause any nearby skulking buck to break out. And be ready at the end. These educated bucks may burst out minutes after the drive, when most hunters are downing sandwiches with their guns propped against trees.

FS

Photograph by **PETER BOHLER**

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## MANAGEMENT

# Food-Plot Rx

A two-step solution to keeping deer happy and fed—and on your land **By Gerald Almy**

It's frustrating: You invested a lot of time, effort, and money into creating food plots on your property, but you're not getting a lot of production. Worse, what grows on those plots gets eaten up so quickly that deer don't stick around—which is the whole point of putting in food plots.



*The Plot Thickens*

Deep plowing and perennial plantings help keep deer around.

**Diagnosis**

→ Deer are moving to nearby property where there's more acreage in plots, with crops that offer better nutrition and palatability. So you need to improve existing plots and break ground for future sites.

**Rx**

→ To improve your output per acre, buy a plow such as the

CountyLine Middle Buster (\$150; tractorsupply.com) and plow plots 8 to 16 inches deep where you've only been shallow-tilling or disking the top by 4 to 8 inches. Your plants need softer, uncompacted soil so roots can dig deep and grow stronger by utilizing phosphorus, potassium, micro-nutrients, and moisture they couldn't reach before. After deep

plowing, let the plot sit for a few weeks, then till to a smooth bed. Now test the soil to determine lime and fertilizer needs, and disk those into the soil.

**Preventive**

→ Clear fresh sites for new plots in areas that you're not hunting now; in areas that you are hunting, plan to make plots after the season closes. Existing forest trails are good potential sites; you can increase light on them by cutting back shading trees on the sides. Natural clearings in woods, log landings, and abandoned fields are other possibilities. If you have none of these, hire a bulldozer operator to create openings in your woods. Clear debris, kill existing vegetation, mow, and then disk or plow the organic residue into the soil. Also consider planting perennials such as clover or chicory, which are rarely destroyed by overbrowsing and will keep white-tails on your land even if they eat annuals down to the ground. **FS**

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CONTINUED FROM P. 71

stickings, so to speak. Here's my chance. "Get on him, Ed. Get on him!"

I force the gig upstream, against the current. The barbed tines hover over the hog molly for a half second as I calculate the optical distortion. You have to aim behind the fish to compensate for refraction—one more split second and I make my jab, grunting like a javelin thrower. I hear a dispiriting *chiiink* as the gig hits the bottom. I have no idea where the fish went. When I glance over at Reed, he's back on his side of the bow deck, piling suckers into the washtub. I was concentrating so hard that I didn't notice the end of the boat ramp sliding into the light. It startles me. The boat grinds into the riprap with a grim tone of finality.

My turn is over. My gig is up.

#### OUT OF THE RIVER, INTO THE FRYING PAN

By now word about our fish fry on the riverbank has spread, and the group of a half dozen giggers has swollen with the addition of perhaps 15 others. Their disappointment shows when they hear I was skunked, and I'm a bit embarrassed myself. One fellow, Cayman Reed, sidles up close. He's a polite young man. "It ain't easy till you figure out the trick," he says.

"So what's the trick?" I ask.

"You get that gig right above the head," he says, very seriously. "And you don't stick him, but you *pin him* to the bottom."

"Really?" I laugh. "That's the big mystery? That's all you got for me?"

He turns a little red. "It's kinda hard to explain," he admits, and I pat him on the back. Given my sorry showing so far, I'm grateful for any advice. Thankfully, there's not much time to lick my wounds. I can't claim a hand in our haul, but 100 pounds of fish need cleaning, so I roll up my sleeves.

Back in the day, Ozark folks salted and pickled suckers for long-term storage, but in modern times, almost all of the fish are bound straight for fish batter and hot grease. Our base camp is already set up for a serious feed. A fire roars on the riverbank, surrounded by camp chairs. Four propane tanks power the floodlights and fish cookers. A Formica tabletop is perched on oil drums. There are card tables and an ironing board topped with scrap wood—an ingenious mobile fish cleaning station. I've stumbled into a hillbilly Burning Man.

I elbow my way into a half dozen guys cleaning fish on the bed of a work truck, and someone slides me a scaler. The secret to sucker cuisine is in the scoring. A few guys meticulously score fish with cuts maybe ¼ inch apart, all the way to the bone,

but Reed has a more inventive method: He runs fish through a homemade scoring contraption. A fillet is placed in a tray, then put through said contraption with a couple dozen stainless-steel razor blades that open up the meat. "Like one of those blooming onions," Nate Hagedorn says. It's as odd a way to prep a fish as I've ever seen. The last step, though, is fish fry 101: Dredge the fish in dry batter and slide them into a black-iron pot simmering with oil. Reed dips them out with a long-handled wire spoon and we dive in as soon as the fish are cool enough to handle. The bones have vanished. Each ¼-inch segment is crisp as a potato chip. I take a bite.

I'm with Reed: Scored right and fried right, I'm not sure I've tasted better.

#### HOG MOLLY HEAVEN

While there's a 20-per-person limit on suckers, no one wants to gig more than they can eat, and we have plenty. I'm starting to wonder if I'll head home batting zero for the night. That's when Braun tells us that he and his wife will take all the extra suckers we can provide. Thankfully, motive and opportunity conspire to get me back on the boat, gig in hand, with revenge on my mind.

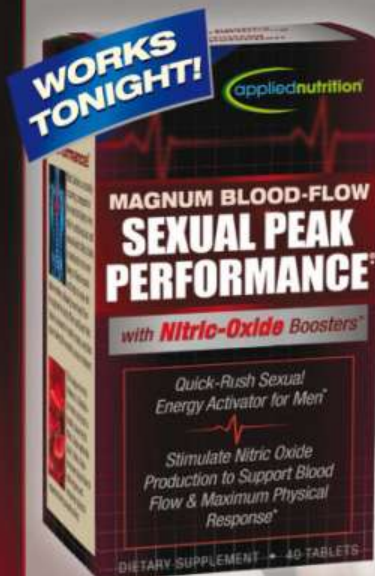
This round I'm partnered up with Nathan Collins, soft-spoken and thoughtful beyond his 18 years. It hasn't been that long since he was the beginner himself, watching from the back of the boat. "First I wasn't tall enough to reach over the rail," he tells me. "Then I wasn't strong enough to hold the gig. It's a physical sport. But I just watched a lot till I figured it out."

By now the fish have been stirred up by hours of gigging, and they're flighty. Still, Collins is a machine. He's sticking fish after fish, while I'm jabbing at flashes like swatting mosquitoes by hand. Brad Reed is on the tiller, and there's no hiding the fact that he's trying to run down fish on my side of the boat. My arms are wearing out when I spot a hog molly playing possum—hunkered down behind a rock. *My kind of trash fish*, I think. I hover the four barbs over the sucker's back, and when I jab the gig home I feel the tines pin the fish to the bottom. Cayman Reed was right. That's the trick.

"There he is! Yes, sir!" Collins praises, with as much relief as good wishes, I suspect. "Nice hog molly! Not bad!"

*Not bad.* I figure that's pretty high praise for a greenhorn gigger. I shouldn't have expected to roll into the Ozarks and pick up a lauded tradition without paying a few first-timer dues. I scrape the fish into the washtub and finally feel like I'm in the game. The best part is, the night's still young. **FS**

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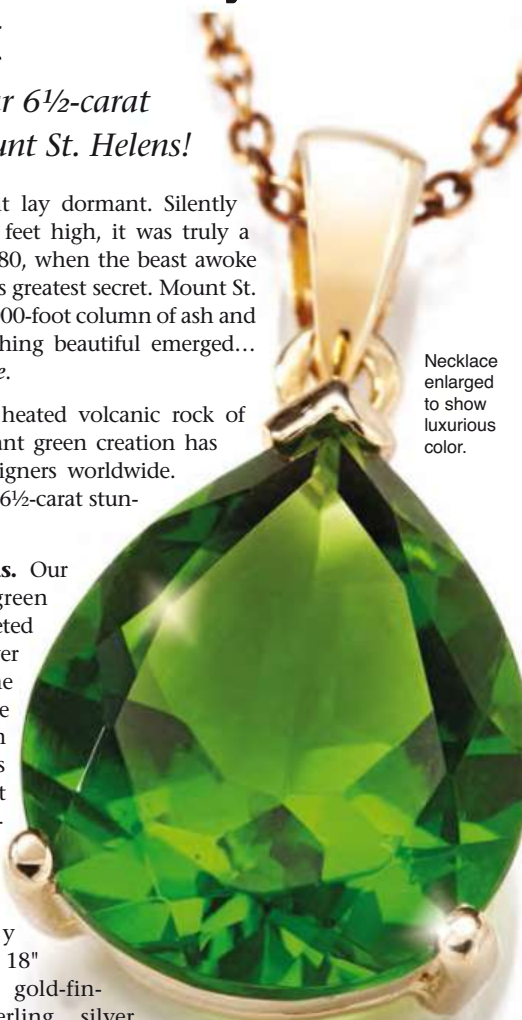
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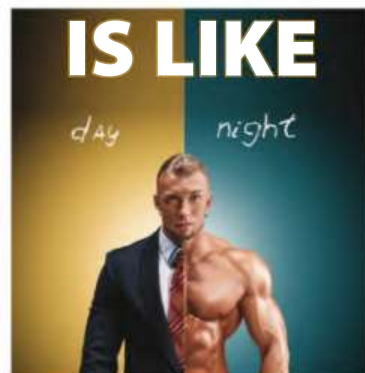


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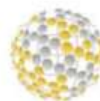
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# Gun owners set to get free survival food

**F**armers vow to keep up with the rush to supply every gun owner who calls toll free and beats the deadline to claim their free 72-hour survival food kit.

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“This is all happening because we’re worried that the people in Washington have an agenda that is about more than just guns and ammo,” explained Frank Bates, a spokesman for the company.



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We already know that they’re coming after our guns ... food could be next, and none of us wants to ever rely on this or any government to keep our families fed.”

Experts say that everyone should

have at least a 72-hour supply of non-perishable food on hand at all times.

Unfortunately, too many people make the mistake of choosing products that were never intended to be survival food. They end up with expensive stockpiles that are too big and too bulky to move, should an emergency force them to leave their homes.

**Chances are, their foods were not packaged for a 25-year or more shelf life. Most are not.**

And if they were unlucky enough to stock up on MREs, they’ll be depending on a product that can actually make you sick if you eat it for too long.

Food4Patriots survival foods are made of the finest ingredients, grown and packaged right here in the USA. They taste great. They provide the nutrition you need. And they were developed specifically for use in emergencies – although a lot of folks sometimes like them for a quick meal or snack.

Bates explained, “These are home-style meals that we package in airtight and resealable military-grade Mylar pouches that keep them fresh and delicious until they’re needed. Your family will enjoy meals much like they’re already eating every day.”

Every 72-hour kit that’s being given away contains four servings each of such familiar dishes as Liberty Bell Potato Cheddar Soup, Blue Ribbon Creamy Chicken Rice, Travelers Stew, and the always loved Granny’s Homestyle Potato Soup.

The company’s usual price for the 72-hour kit is \$27.00 plus shipping. But



*Gun owners are flocking to claim their free 72-hour survival food kit before the deadline.*

gun owners who act quickly can pay only the \$9.95 shipping and handling fee through this program.

“We’re trying to ensure no gun owner gets left out, but they have to hurry because we have a limited supply of the 72-hour kits we can give away,” Bates warned. “Once word got out that gun owners could get free survival food, our phones have been ringing off the hook. We actually had to add extra agents to keep up with the incredible demand.”

**There is still time to take advantage of this free food offer, but be aware the program will end no matter what at midnight, December 15, 2015.”**

## **HOW TO GET YOUR FREE 72-HOUR SURVIVAL FOOD KIT:**

Food4Patriots is committed to giving a free 72-hour kit to everyone who calls their toll-free hotline. Just give the agent the approval code shown below. Provide your delivery instructions and agree to pay the \$9.95 shipping and handling fee. That’s all there is to it.

**Approval Code: 72FREE**

**Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-936-0199**

**Offer Cut-Off Date: 12/15/2015**

Please note: Food4Patriots says they will continue to give away these 72-hour kits for as long as their supplies last.

Due to media exposure, their phone lines may be busy. Just keep calling and you will get through.



# — 2015 —

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# TRUE GRIT

Jim bests me in sporting clays, putting out fires, and bravery

By Bill Heavey



**I**N CASE YOU EVER get thrown in jail—and I'm not suggesting that you do—you probably already know which of your friends you'd burn your one phone call on. If you're lucky, he's not just a guy who would post your bail but one who would also pick you up at 4 A.M., make sure you're O.K., and even tell the cops that you couldn't have robbed that orphanage because the two of you were getting drunk in a strip club at the time.

I know who I'd call. Jim, my friend of more than 30 years. We've each seen the other through a divorce, periods of high drama and low money, and various births and deaths. Twenty-five years ago, I held his eldest son the day he came home from the hospital. Sixteen years ago, when my baby daughter stopped breathing at four months, I can't remember who I called first, but it was probably Jim.

I do remember his 40th birthday party, billed—accurately—by his then wife as “world's oldest man turns 40.” And I remember my 50th, a surprise party at which I arrived three hours late. My wife at the time was displeased that I'd kept a houseful of guests waiting. “People mostly sat around being polite. Then the curtains caught fire and everyone sat there like they were paralyzed. Jim pulled them down, ran outside, and stomped the flames out.” At the time I remember thinking, *That sounds about right. Jim would be the guy to do that.*

And now the jerk is dying. At first he thought the pain was a strained stomach muscle from kayaking the Potomac's whitewater. When he finally went to the doctor, the diagnosis was pseudocysts, benign and mostly fluid, on his pancreas. Then they were true cysts, but still no cause for alarm. Then cancerous. Then inoperable, wrapped around major arteries. Jim told me all this in a matter-of-fact phone call. He made it sound like he might be getting the flu. I stopped researching the ailment after five minutes. It was just too grim. Pancreatic is the black mamba of cancers—aggressive, lethal, and pitiless. Seventy-three percent of those diagnosed are dead within a year, the lowest survival rate among all 21 common cancers. As I sat at my computer, the bottom fell out of the world. I felt the huge, bored yawn of the abyss. It's strange. Until then, I had no idea how much I love the guy.

He's taking Elvis-level pain meds, which allow him to sleep at night. He's halfway through six weeks on chemo, after which they'll scan again. Then, if he can take it, a short rest and more chemo. There's a snowball's chance that radiation might buy some time. But the doctors no longer talk timelines, much less any chance of a cure. Jim—wisely, in my view—hasn't asked. Now it's all about controlling his pain until there is no more pain.

Jim is an Oklahoma boy. By which I mean that while we've been texting and talking more often than in the past, we rarely mention his cancer. He's still working, trying to leave something behind for his wife and two 20-something sons whose children he'll never hold.

We shot sporting clays the other day. He was gaunt, 20 pounds lighter, skin stretched tight over his skull. It was probably a miracle that he could shoot at all. He was short of shells, so I offered some of mine, Winchester Xtra-Lite Target loads, which have an ounce of shot. He declined, saying the shop sold ones with  $\frac{7}{8}$  ounce. This from a guy I'd once seen lift a washing machine off the floor so it wouldn't scratch the linoleum. As we walked to the first station, I looked down. “Bud, what happened to your ass?” I asked. His buttocks were flat planes, as if sliced away. He shrugged, told me he now requires a pad to sit on a wooden chair, that his clothes hang off him like a scarecrow. “Don't know how much sense it makes to be investing in new ones. Or even what size to get.”

And then he shot my lights out. He missed a few of the high crossers that have always troubled him, but on most stands he broke four, five, sometimes six out of six birds. “Damn,” I said. “They might have to put chemo on the list of performance-enhancing drugs.” When I dropped him off, we just shook hands and said, “Later.”

A few days after, he e-mailed that he hadn't realized getting ready to die involved so much paperwork. He was still keeping the news from anyone he didn't have to tell. There wasn't a whiff of self-pity in any of it.

I wrote back that it was pretty damn selfish of him to get cancer, that it showed little regard for his friends and family, and that he'd been brought up better. Who, I asked, was I supposed to call from jail now? I said that in light of his weakened state, I could probably kick his ass and just might the next time I saw him.

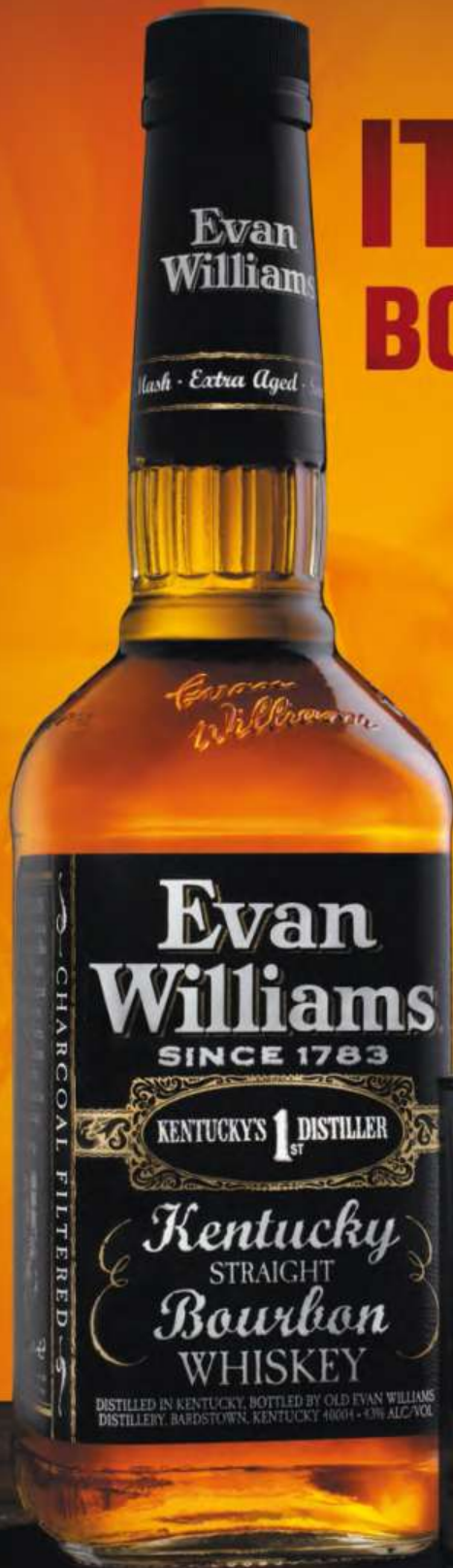
His reply, in its entirety, was “Well you could try.”

It was the most courageous response imaginable. I lost it, hard, knew better than to even try to stop the tears. I let them come. And tried once more to come to terms with the unbelievable fact that this is actually happening.

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